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THE GATHERERS STRIKE!

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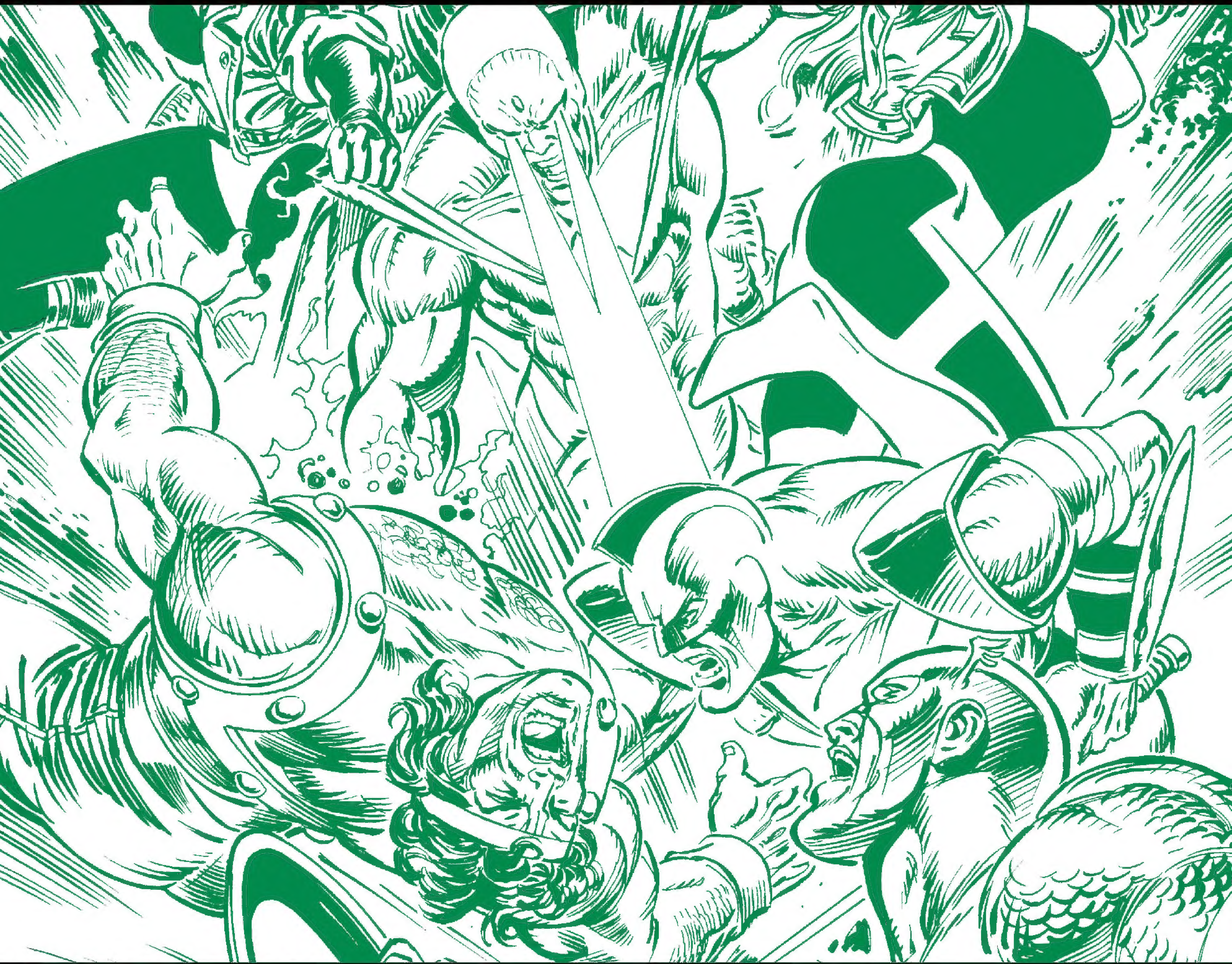

AVENGERS

THE GATHERERS STRIKE!

VOLUME 24

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AVENGERS #360-366 & ANNUAL #22, AVENGERS: THE TERMINATRIX OBJECTIVE #1-4,
AVENGERS STRIKEFILE AND AVENGERS ANNIVERSARY MAGAZINE

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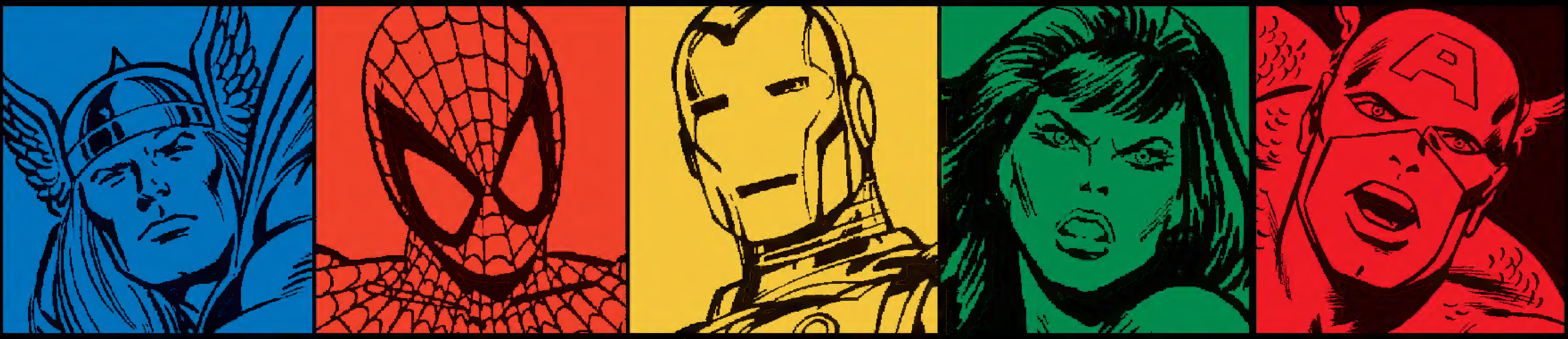

AVENGERS

THE GATHERERS STRIKE!

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360
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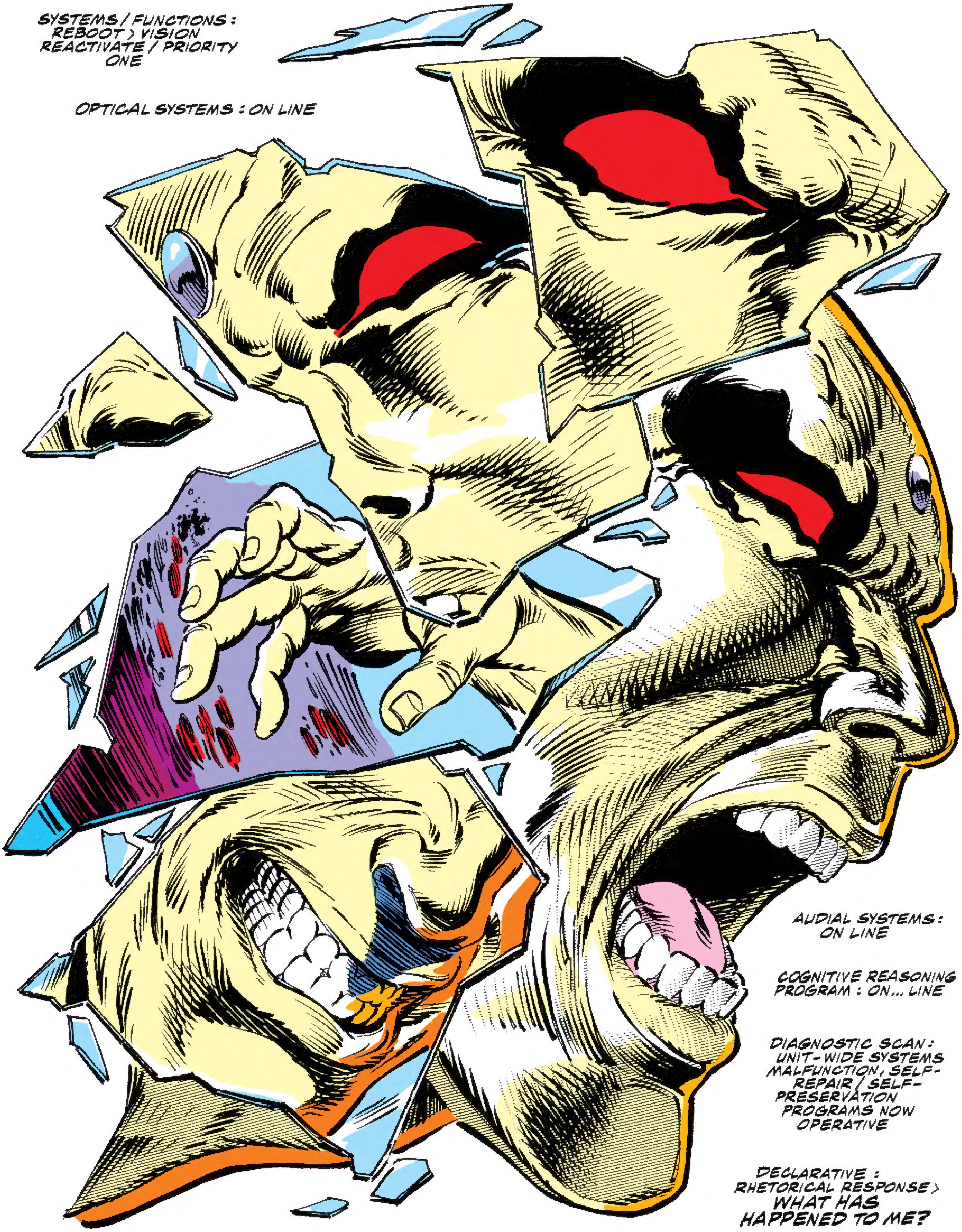
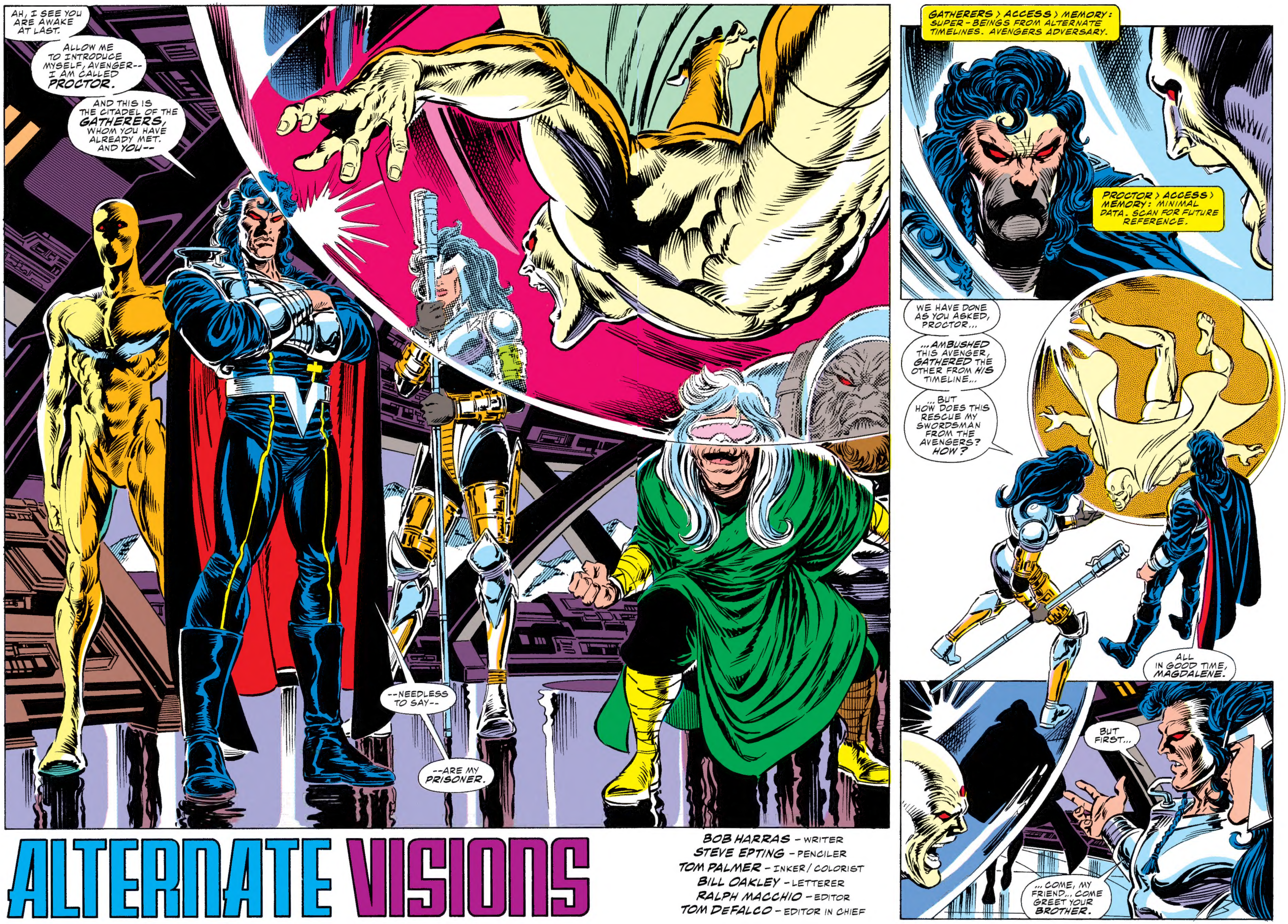
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
BEGINNING THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF THE
AVENGERS®
ALTERNATE VISIONS

TO COMBAT THOSE THREATS WHICH NO SINGLE HERO CAN STAND AGAINST, EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES HAVE FORGED A COVENANT TO UNITE IN BATTLE FOR THE PROTECTION OF ALL MANKIND! STAN LEE PRESENTS . . .

THE MIGHTY AVENGERS!


SYSTEMS / FUNCTIONS : REBOOT > VISION REACTIVATE / PRIORITY ONE
OPTICAL SYSTEMS : ON LINE
AUDIAL SYSTEMS : ON LINE
COGNITIVE REASONING PROGRAM : ON... LINE
DIAGNOSTIC SCAN : UNIT-WIDE SYSTEMS MALFUNCTION, SELF-REPAIR / SELF-PRESERVATION PROGRAMS NOW OPERATIVE
DECLARATIVE : RHETORICAL RESPONSE > WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO ME?


AH, I SEE YOU ARE AWAKE AT LAST.
ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE MYSELF, AVENGER-- I AM CALLED PROCTOR.
AND THIS IS THE CITADEL OF THE GATHERERS, WHOM YOU HAVE ALREADY MET. AND YOU--
--NEEDLESS TO SAY--
--ARE MY PRISONER.
GATHERERS > ACCESS > MEMORY: SUPER-BEINGS FROM ALTERNATE TIMELINES. AVENGERS ADVERSARY.
PROCTOR > ACCESS > MEMORY: MINIMAL DATA. SCAN FOR FUTURE REFERENCE.
WE HAVE DONE AS YOU ASKED, PROCTOR...
...AMBUSHED THIS AVENGER, GATHERED THE OTHER FROM HIS TIMELINE...
...BUT HOW DOES THIS RESCUE MY SWORDSMAN FROM THE AVENGERS? HOW?
ALL IN GOOD TIME, MAGDALENE.
BUT FIRST...
...COME, MY FRIEND... COME GREET YOUR BROTHER.

ALTERNATE VISIONS

BOB HARRAS - WRITER
STEVE EPTING - PENCILER
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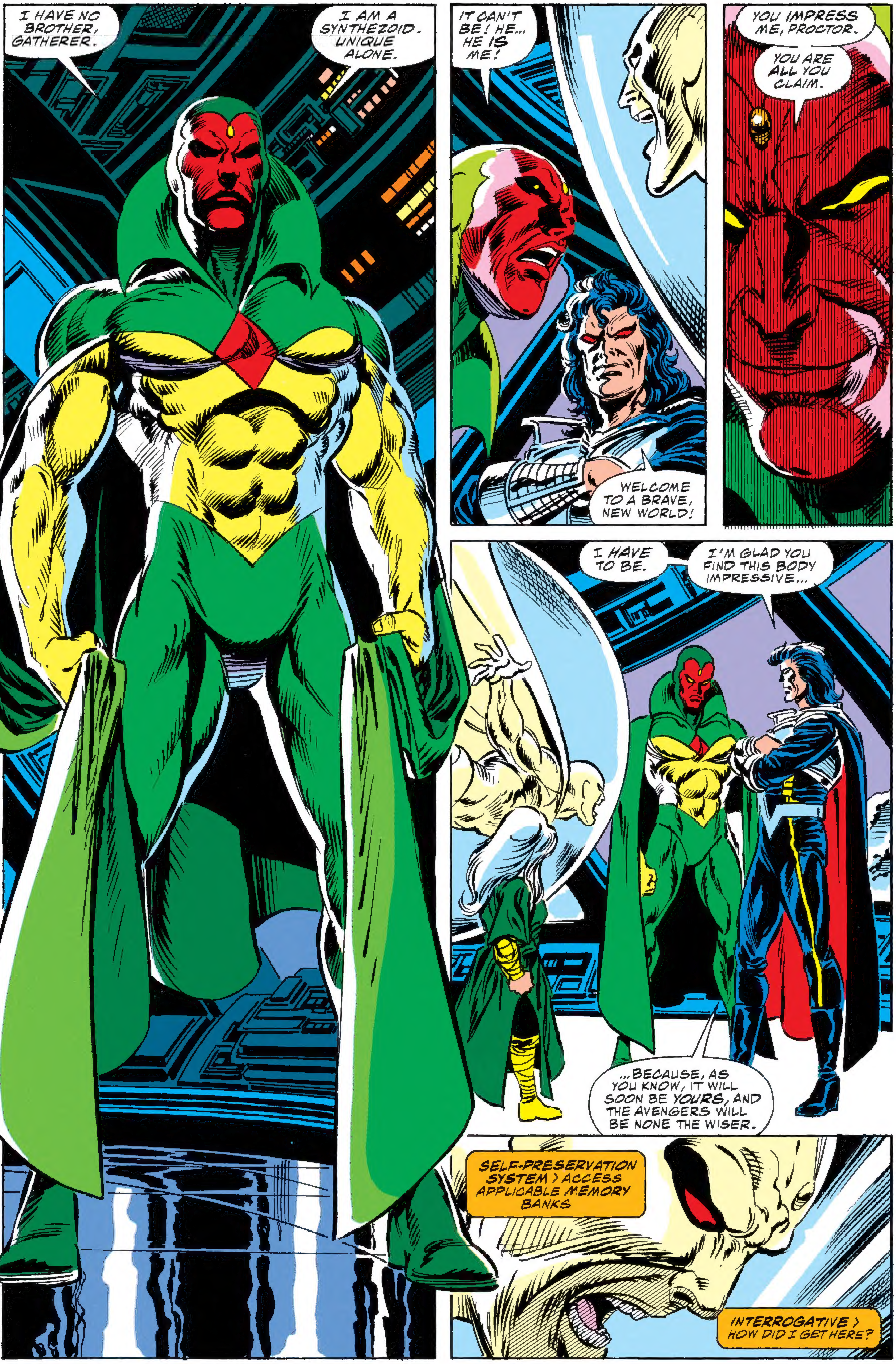
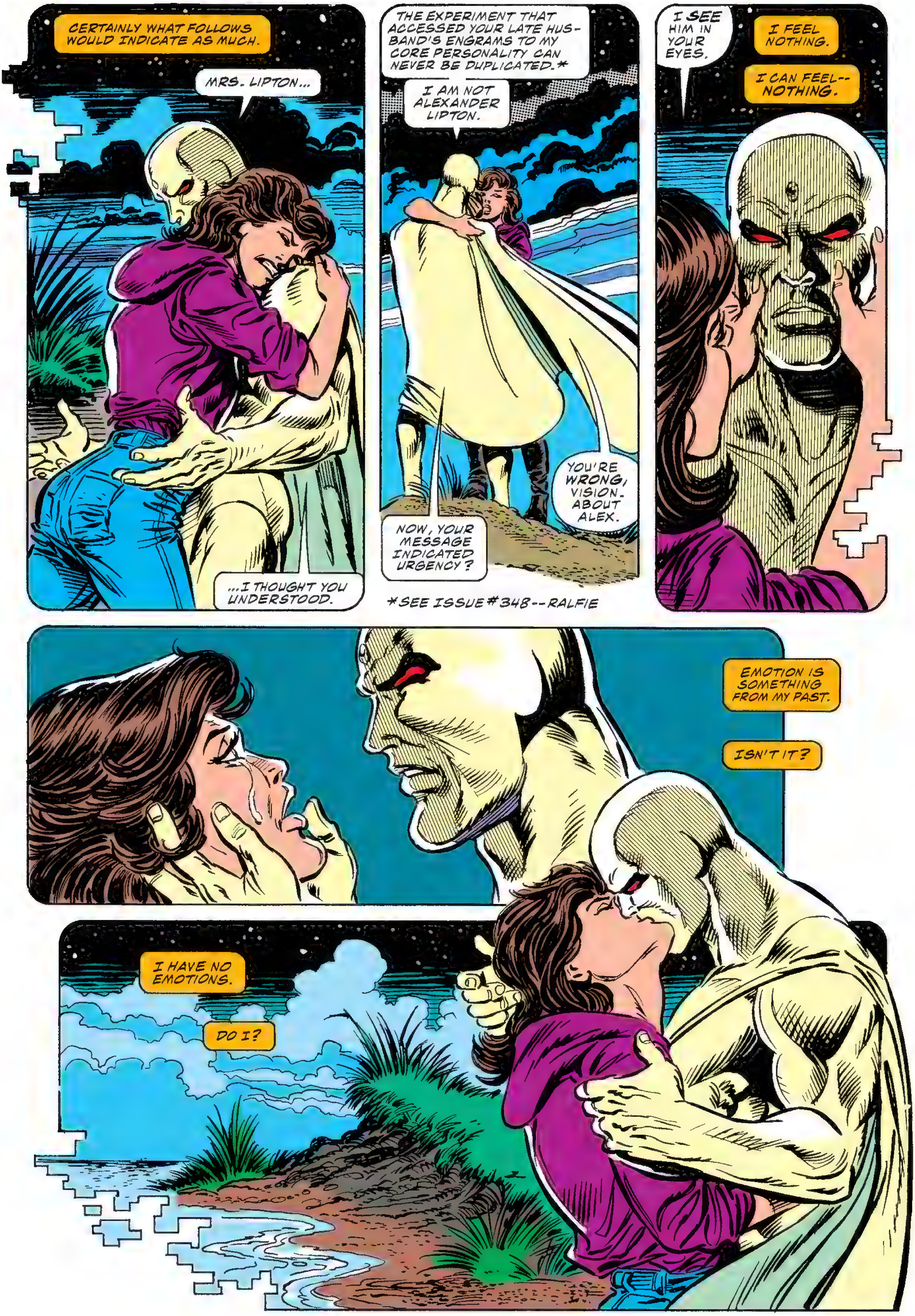
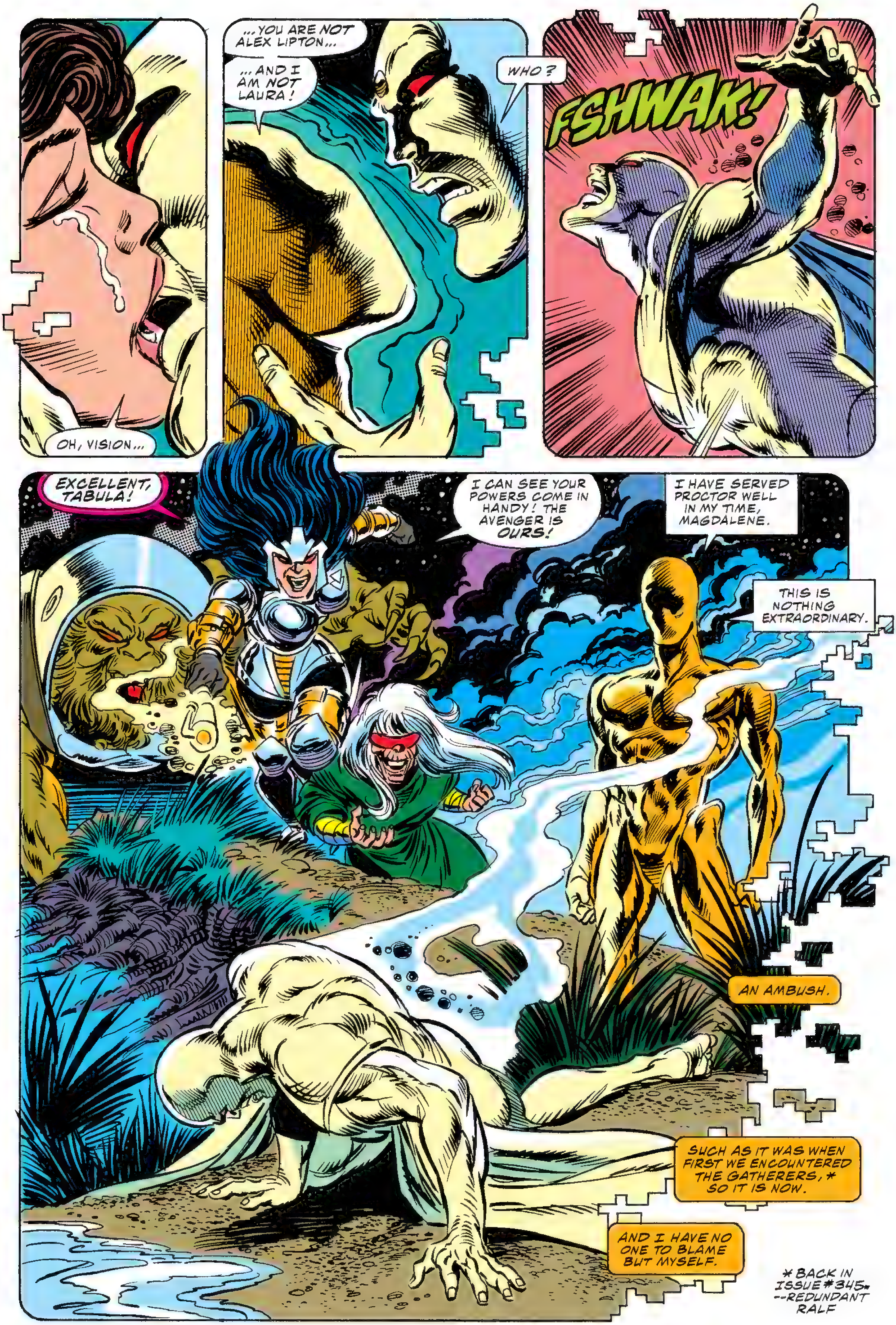

I HAVE NO BROTHER, GATHERER.
I AM A SYNTHEZOID. UNIQUE ALONE.
IT CAN'T BE! HE... HE IS ME!
WELCOME TO A BRAVE, NEW WORLD!
YOU IMPRESS ME, PROCTOR.
YOU ARE ALL YOU CLAIM.
I HAVE TO BE.
I'M GLAD YOU FIND THIS BODY IMPRESSIVE...
...BECAUSE, AS YOU KNOW, IT WILL SOON BE YOURS, AND THE AVENGERS WILL BE NONE THE WISER.
SELF-PRESERVATION SYSTEM > ACCESS APPLICABLE MEMORY BANKS
INTERROGATIVE > HOW DID I GET HERE?

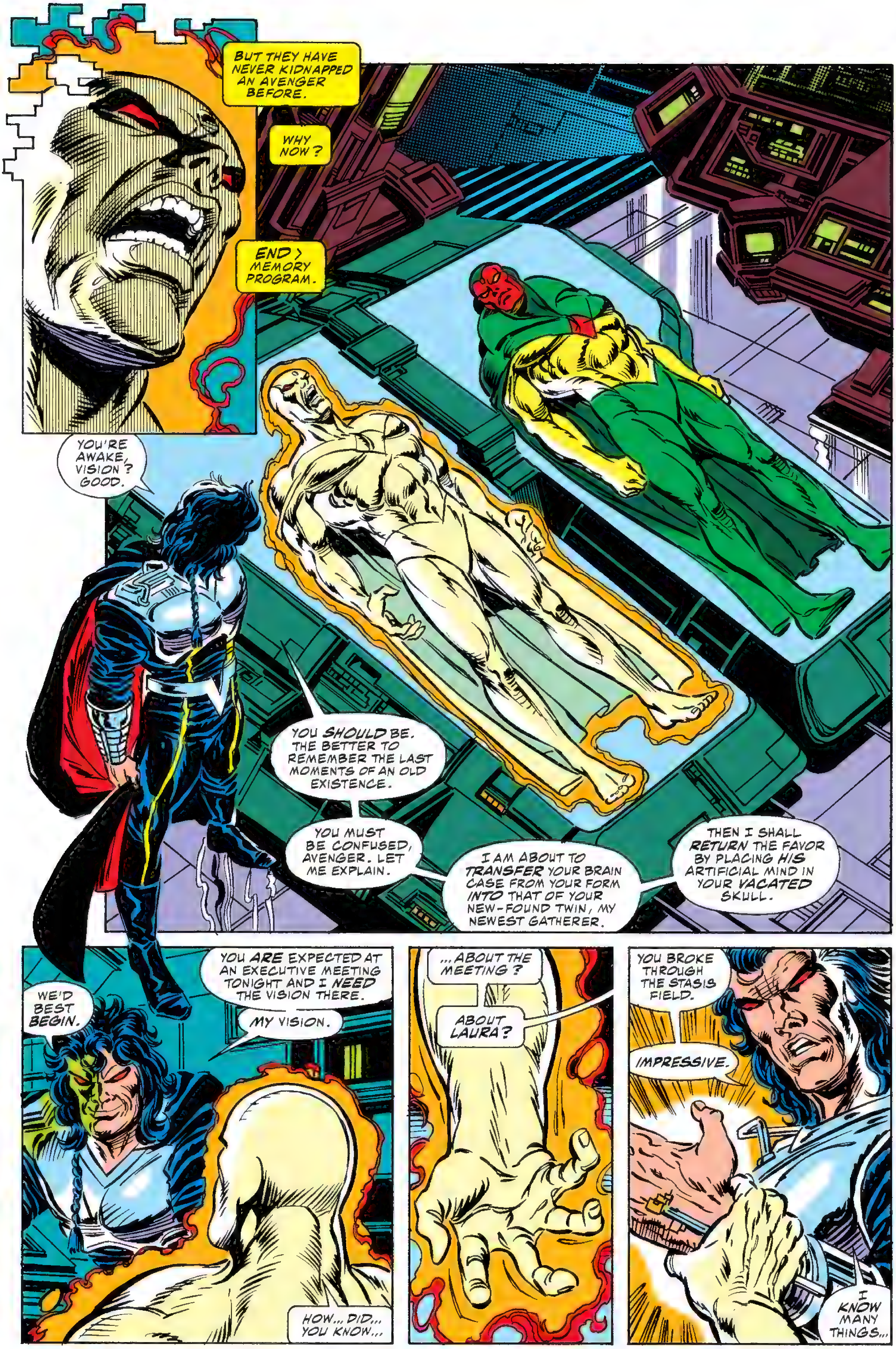
MEMORY ACCESSED > TIME FRAME 4.6 HOURS AGO.
LOCATION > AVENGERS MANSION. RECORDS ROOM.
SOCIAL INTERACTION > PHILIP JARVERT, FORMER GATHERER, CODE-NAME: SWORDSMAN.
AMAZING.
THE LIFE OF THIS DIMENSION'S SWORDSMAN IS SO SIMILAR TO MINE, AND YET THE DIFFERENCES ARE VAST, VISION.
SO VAST.
AND I CAN NEVER GO HOME.
THERE MAY BE A WAY, SWORDSMAN.
WE NEED ONLY THE DATA TO--
NO. MY WORLD IS DEAD.
SOMEHOW, I'M SURE OF THAT.
YOU'VE TREATED ME WITH NOTHING BUT KINDNESS, VISION...
...I WANT TO APOLOGIZE FOR ALL I'VE DONE.
THERE IS NO NEED. YOUR MIND WAS AFFECTED BY THE DIMENSION-TRANSIT.
SPEAKING OF WHICH--! ONE OF THOSE HEADACHES IS COMING ON.
PROCTOR COULD HANDLE THIS! I CAN'T!
PROCTOR?

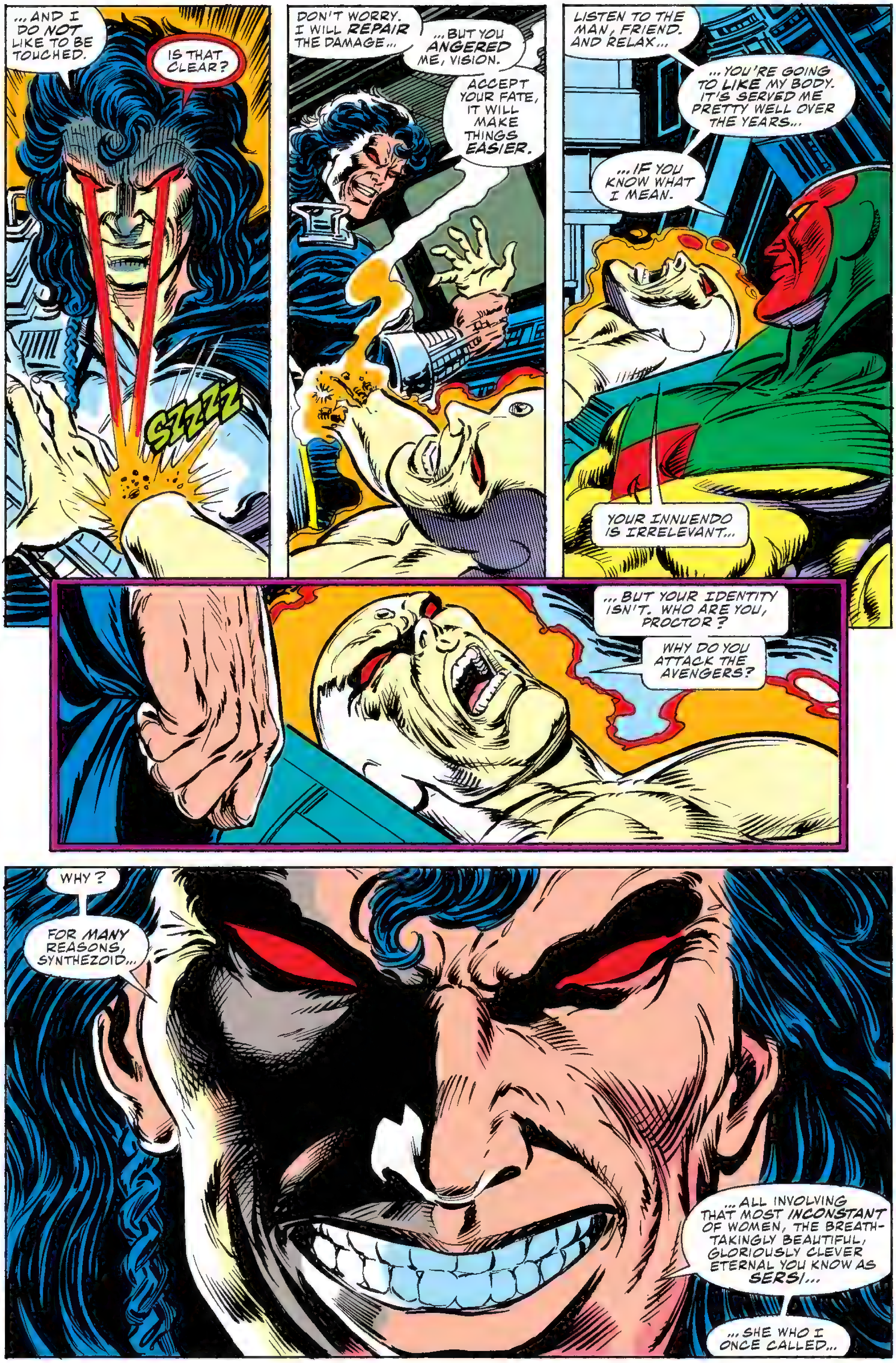
VISION, I DON'T MEAN TO INTERRUPT...
...BUT THIS MESSAGE JUST CAME SPECIAL DELIVERY.
ACCESS: PERSONNEL FILE: IDENTITY > CRYSTAL MAXIMORF. STATUS: FELLOW AVENGER. COMRADE, ALLY, FRIEND.
PHILIP!
IS IT ANOTHER ATTACK?
DO YOU WANT ME TO CALL THE DOCTOR?
NEVER DOES ANY GOOD, CRYS--
--BUT IT'S PASSING. THANKS.
CRYSTAL...
...WOULD YOU PLEASE INFORM THE BLACK WIDOW THAT I WILL NOT BE ATTENDING TONIGHT'S EXECUTIVE SESSION?
AS SERSI HAS VANISHED ONCE MORE, I DOUBT THAT MY ABSENCE WILL BE OF MUCH CONSEQUENCE.
MY APOLOGIES, CRYSTAL, BUT THE MATTER IS PERSONAL.
I HAVE URGENT BUSINESS.
BUT, VISION, WE'RE MEETING ABOUT SERSI...
...AND WHAT HAPPENED ON POLEMACHUS!*
*SEE LAST ISSUE.--RALF

SYSTEMS DIAGNOSTIC: REBOOT > COMPLETE. ALL HIGHER BRAIN FUNCTIONS / COGNITIVE REASONING: OPTIMAL LEVEL
GOOD.
MY THOUGHTS ARE CLEAR AGAIN.
AND I AM LEFT TO WONDER WHY I REACTED SO HASTILY TO THAT HANDWRITTEN NOTE...
...THE LURE THAT LED TO MY PRESENT SITUATION.
IT IS NOT IN MY NATURE TO ABANDON MY DUTIES AS AN AVENGER...
...NOR TO DISMISS THE PROPER CONCERNS OF MY TEAMMATES.
THAT I DID THESE THINGS I DO NOT DENY.
IT IS SIMPLY THAT I CANNOT LOGICALLY EXPLAIN WHY I DID THEM.
WHY I FLEW THE LENGTH OF LONG ISLAND...
...TO A DESOLATE BEACH HOUSE ON ITS EASTERN POINT...
ALEX!
THANK GOD YOU CAME!
...WHICH LEADS TO A DISTURBING HYPOTHESIS: I AM CAPABLE OF ILLOGICAL ACTIONS.
AGAIN.


CERTAINLY WHAT FOLLOWS WOULD INDICATE AS MUCH.
MRS. LIPTON...
...I THOUGHT YOU UNDERSTOOD.
THE EXPERIMENT THAT ACCESSED YOUR LATE HUSBAND'S ENGRAMS TO MY CORE PERSONALITY CAN NEVER BE DUPLICATED.*
I AM NOT ALEXANDER LIPTON.
NOW, YOUR MESSAGE INDICATED URGENCY?
YOU'RE WRONG, VISION. ABOUT ALEX.
*SEE ISSUE #348--RALFIE
I SEE HIM IN YOUR EYES.
I FEEL NOTHING.
I CAN FEEL-- NOTHING.
EMOTION IS SOMETHING FROM MY PAST.
ISN'T IT?
I HAVE NO EMOTIONS.
DO I?

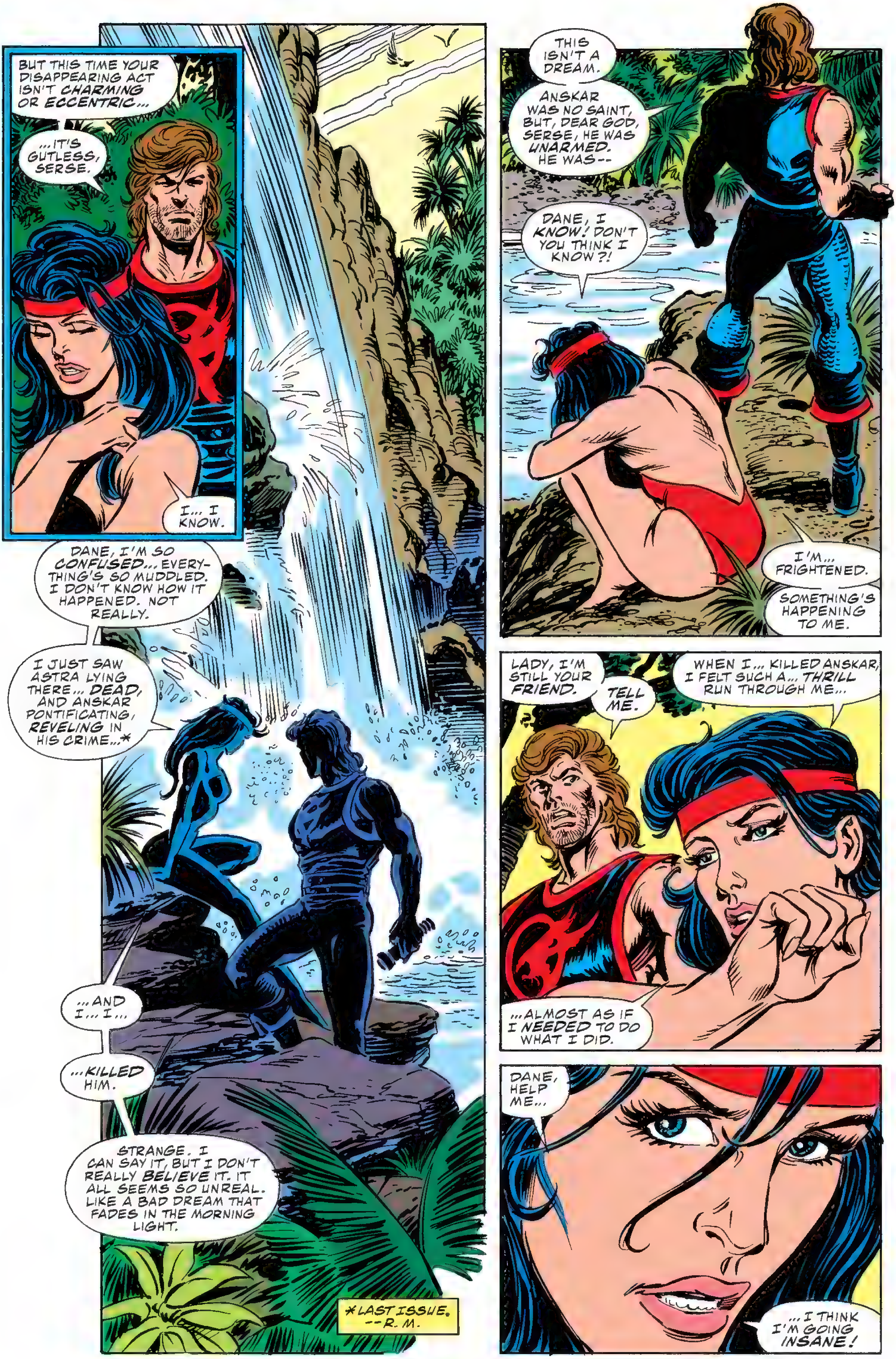

OH, VISION...
...YOU ARE NOT ALEX LIPTON...
...AND I AM NOT LAURA!
WHO?
FSHWAK!
EXCELLENT, TABULA!
I CAN SEE YOUR POWERS COME IN HANDY! THE AVENGER IS OURS!
I HAVE SERVED PROCTOR WELL IN MY TIME, MAGDALENE.
THIS IS NOTHING EXTRAORDINARY.
AN AMBUSH.
SUCH AS IT WAS WHEN FIRST WE ENCOUNTERED THE GATHERERS,* SO IT IS NOW.
AND I HAVE NO ONE TO BLAME BUT MYSELF.
*BACK IN ISSUE #345. --REDUNDANT RALF

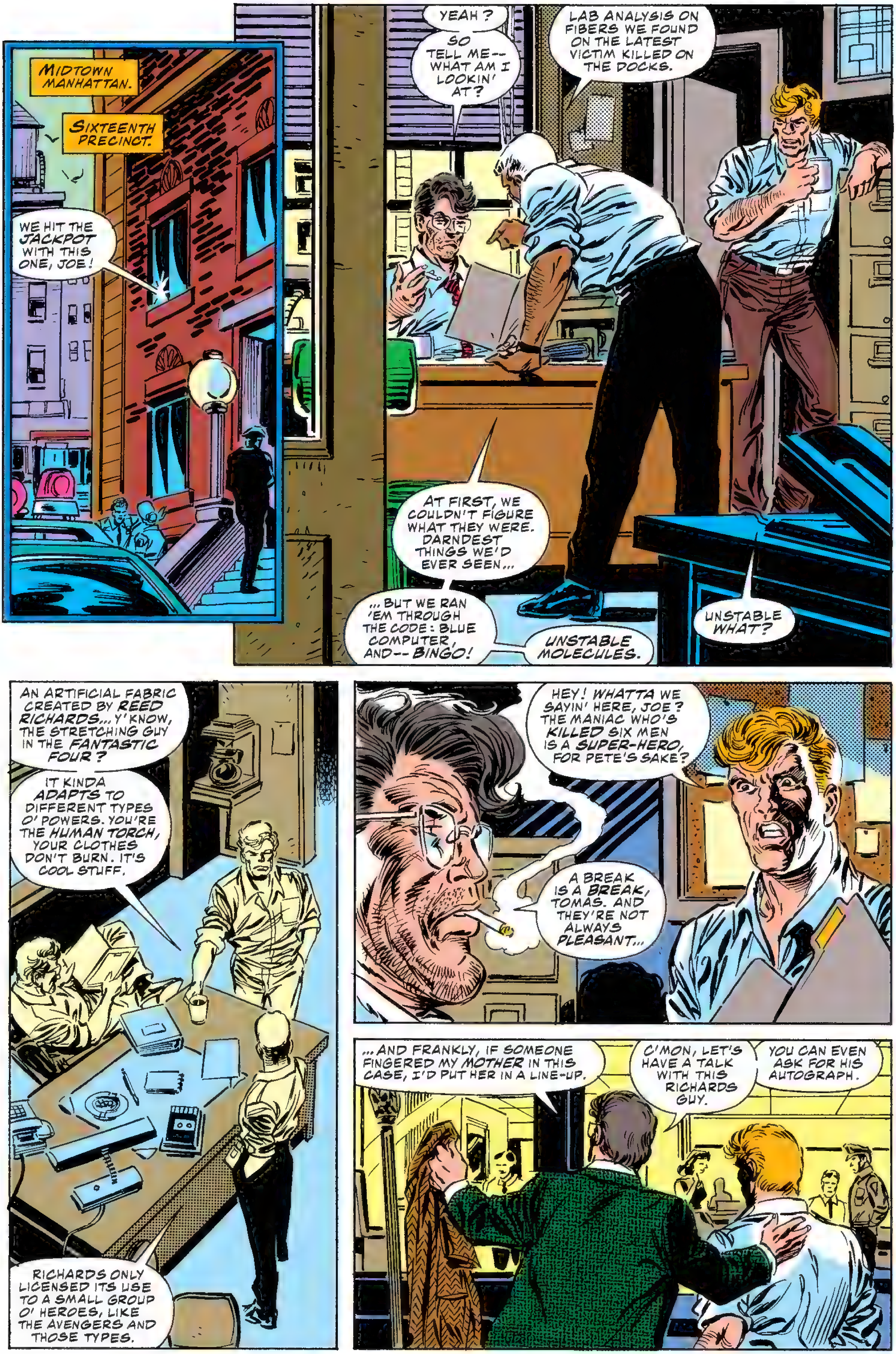

BUT THEY HAVE NEVER KIDNAPPED AN AVENGER BEFORE.
WHY NOW?
END > MEMORY PROGRAM.
YOU'RE AWAKE, VISION? GOOD.
YOU ***SHOULD*** BE. THE BETTER TO REMEMBER THE LAST MOMENTS OF AN OLD EXISTENCE.
YOU MUST BE CONFUSED, AVENGER. LET ME EXPLAIN.
I AM ABOUT TO ***TRANSFER*** YOUR BRAIN CASE FROM YOUR FORM ***INTO*** THAT OF YOUR NEW-FOUND TWIN, MY NEWEST GATHERER.
THEN I SHALL ***RETURN*** THE FAVOR BY PLACING ***HIS*** ARTIFICIAL MIND IN YOUR ***VACATED*** SKULL.
WE'D BEST BEGIN.
YOU ***ARE*** EXPECTED AT AN EXECUTIVE MEETING TONIGHT AND I ***NEED*** THE VISION THERE.
MY VISION.
HOW... DID... YOU KNOW...
...ABOUT THE MEETING?
ABOUT LAURA?
YOU BROKE THROUGH THE STASIS FIELD.
IMPRESSIVE.
I KNOW MANY THINGS...

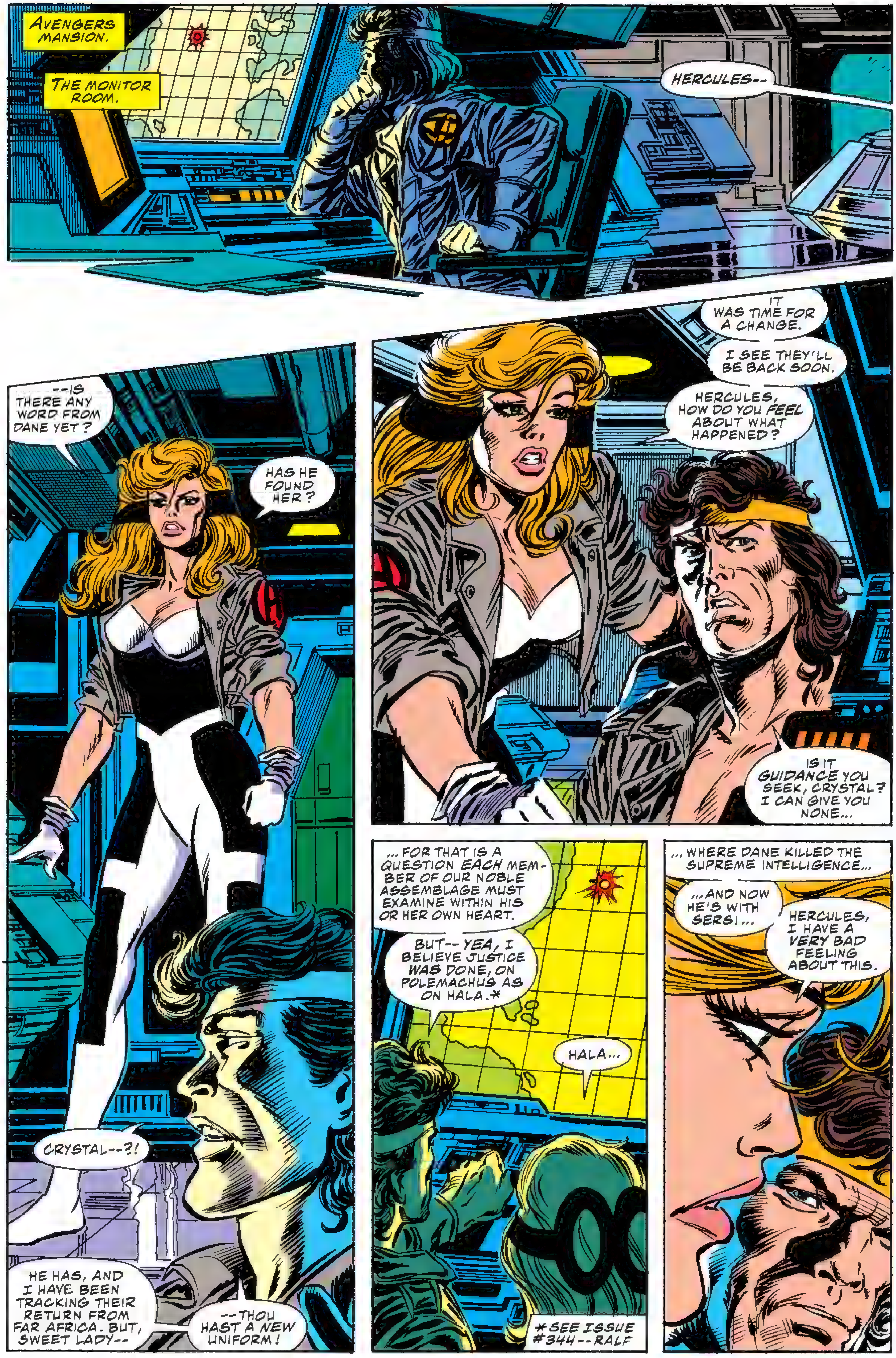

...AND I DO NOT LIKE TO BE TOUCHED.
IS THAT CLEAR?
SZZZZ
DON'T WORRY. I WILL REPAIR THE DAMAGE...
...BUT YOU ANGERED ME, VISION.
ACCEPT YOUR FATE, IT WILL MAKE THINGS EASIER.
LISTEN TO THE MAN, FRIEND. AND RELAX...
...YOU'RE GOING TO LIKE MY BODY. IT'S SERVED ME PRETTY WELL OVER THE YEARS...
...IF YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN.
YOUR INNUENDO IS IRRELEVANT...
...BUT YOUR IDENTITY ISN'T. WHO ARE YOU, PROCTOR?
WHY DO YOU ATTACK THE AVENGERS?
WHY?
FOR MANY REASONS, SYNTHEZOID...
...ALL INVOLVING THAT MOST INCONSTANT OF WOMEN, THE BREATH-TAKINGLY BEAUTIFUL, GLORIOUSLY CLEVER ETERNAL YOU KNOW AS SERSI...
...SHE WHO I ONCE CALLED...

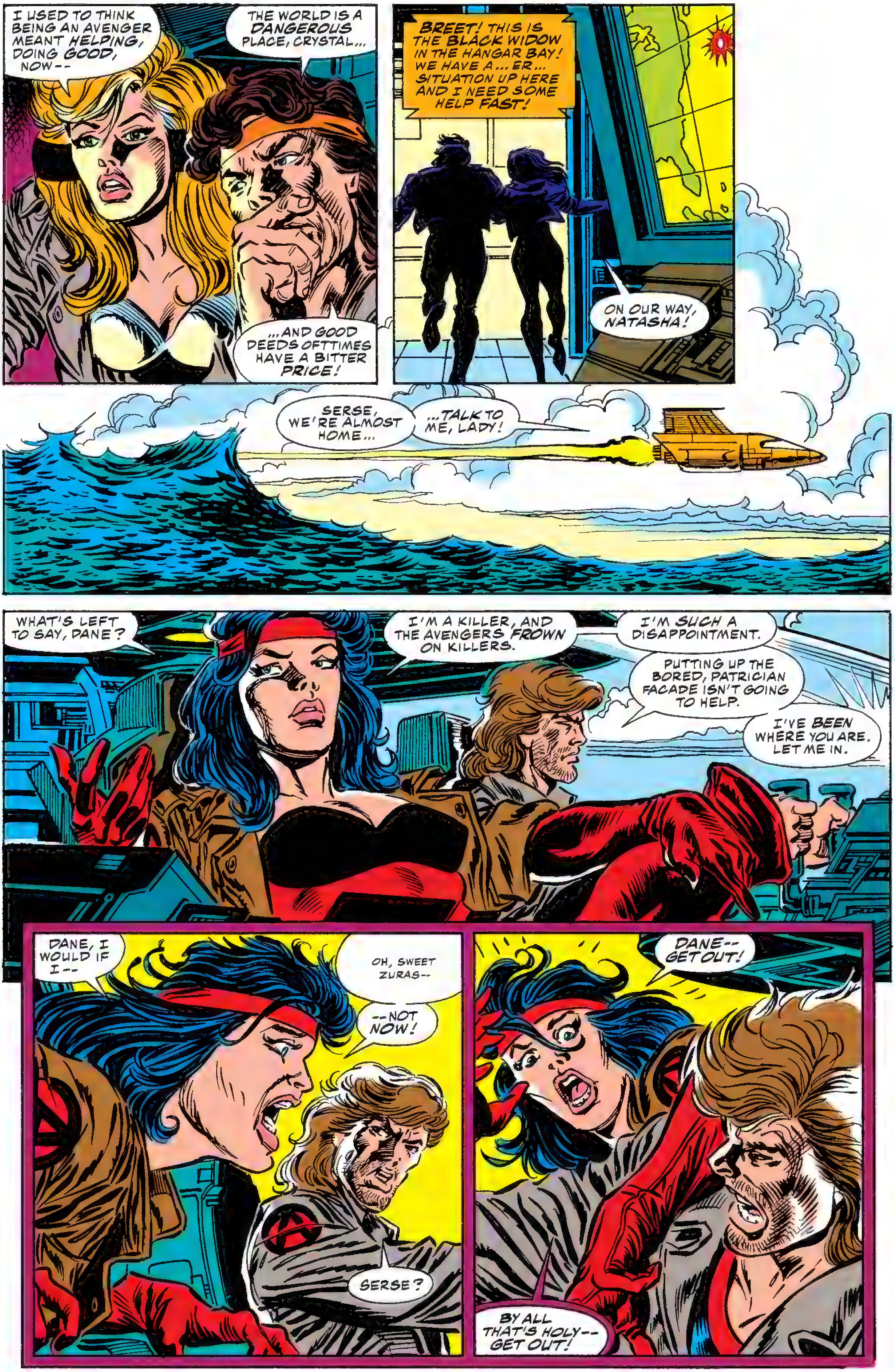
"...MY WIFE."
WARRIOR FALLS, WAKANDA, EQUATORIAL AFRICA.
...AND AS THE WOMAN CALLED SERSI HURLS HERSELF INTO THE ABYSS...
...AND FALLS FAR...
...SHE WILLS HERSELF TO FORGET.
SHE FEELS THE COLD, BRACING WATER WASH AWAY THE MEMORY...
...AND WITH IT, THE GUILT.
SHE FEELS THE HOT SUN WARM HER BODY, AND SHE LOSES HERSELF IN THE HEAT, THINKING ONLY OF HAPPIER TIMES...
...LISTENING TO THE WATERFALL'S ROAR...
...FORGETTING...
IT DOESN'T SEEM POSSIBLE.
TWO DAYS AGO...
...ON ANOTHER WORLD CALLED POLEMACHUS...
...SHE KILLED A MAN.
HE WAS A MURDERER, YES. DESERVING OF DEATH ...PERHAPS.
IT IS TOO MUCH TO THINK ABOUT...
SNAP
WHO--?!

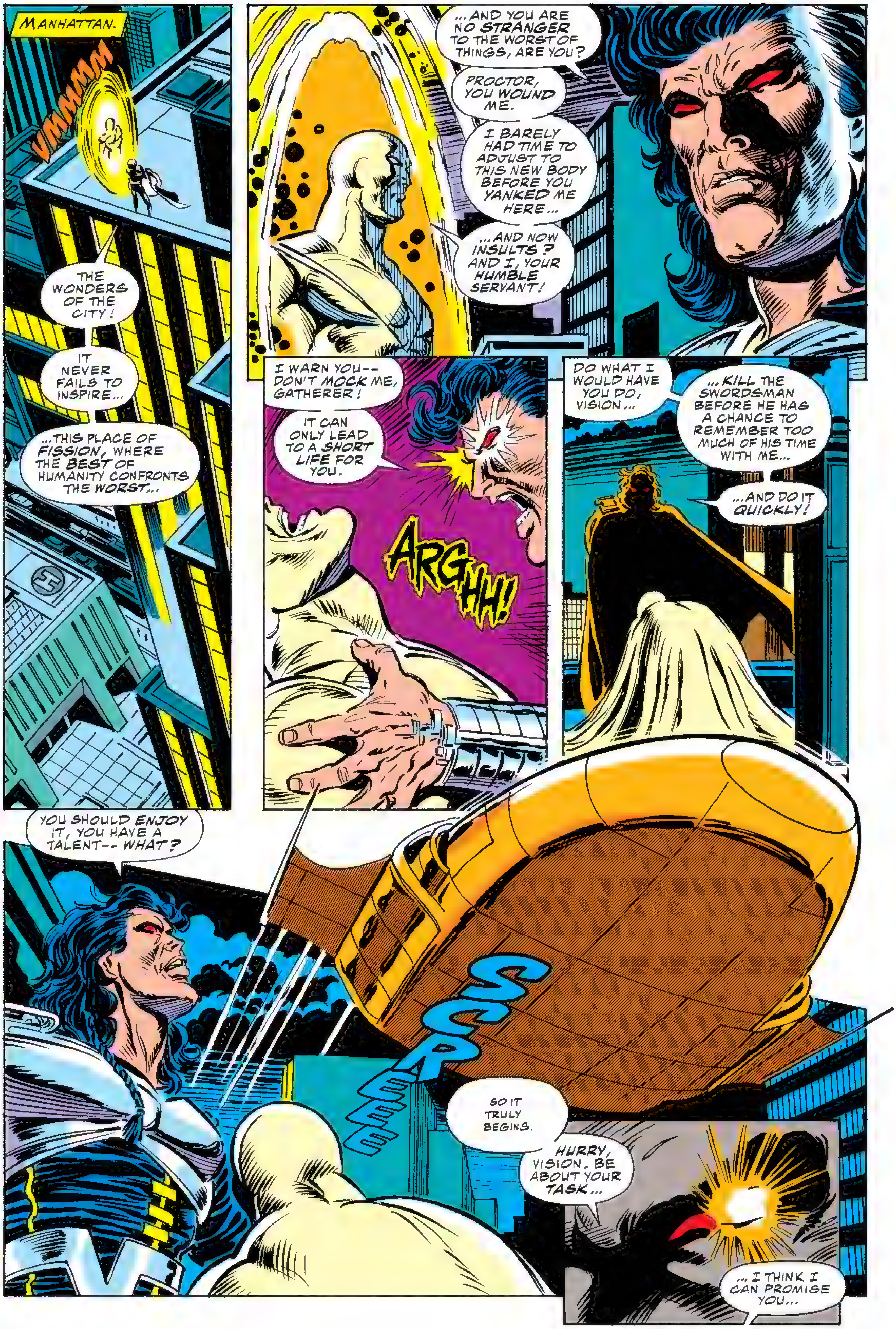
GET AWAY FROM ME!
FWSHAK!
WHOA! WHOA! WHOA!
SERSI! WHAT THE HECK'S WRONG WITH YOU?!
VMMMM
IT'S DANE, LADY! REMEMBER? FELLOW AVENGER? THE GENIUS WITH A DEATHWISH? YOUR ANCHOR IN LIFE? REMEMBER?
DANE?
OH, ZURAS, DANE! I'M SORRY! YOU STARTLED ME... I DIDN'T EXPECT ANYONE TO FOLLOW ME HERE!
I JUST NEEDED TO BE ALONE.
BULL, SERSE.
BE HONEST, NOW MORE THAN EVER.
YOU RAN AWAY.

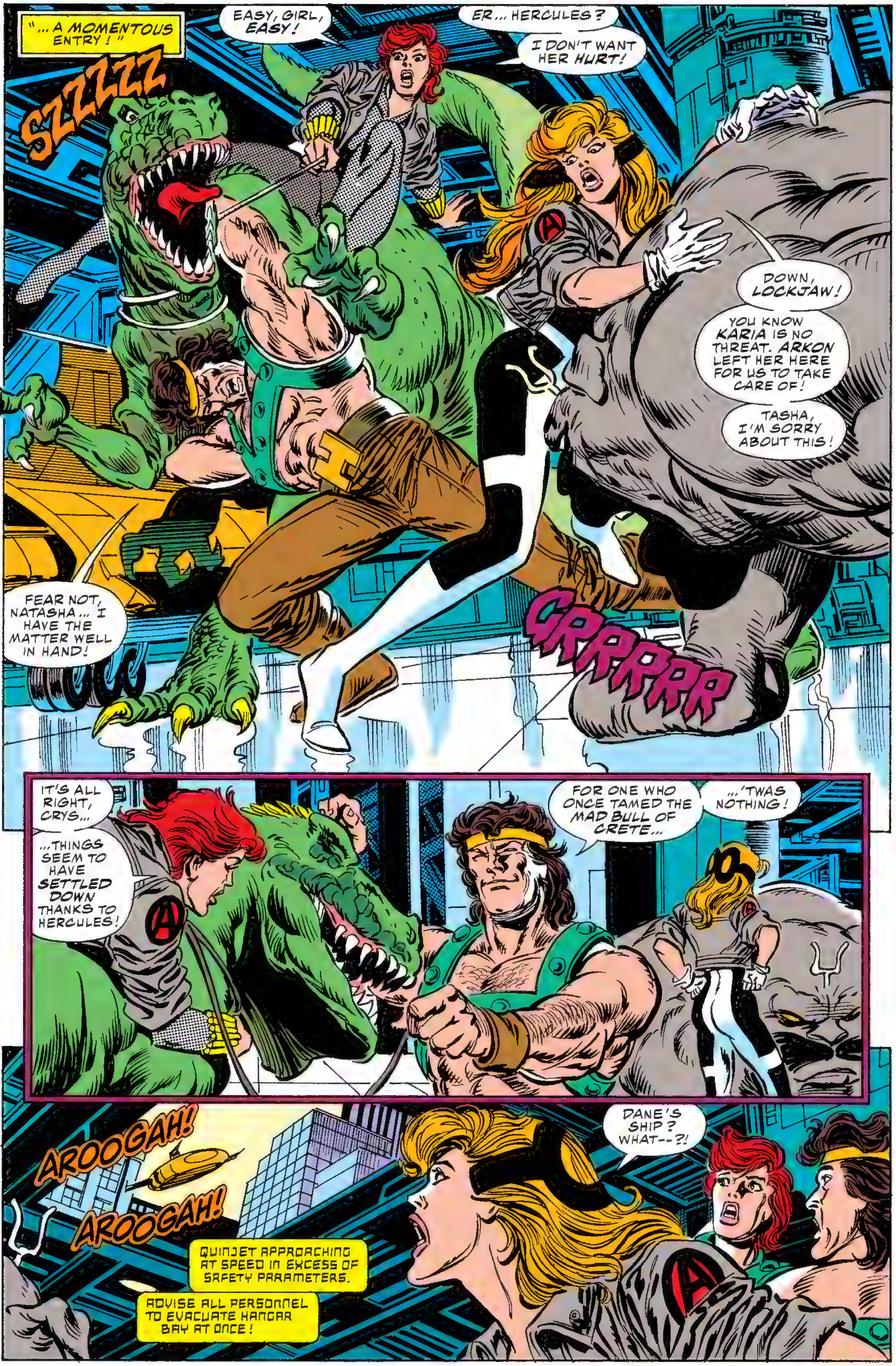

BUT THIS TIME YOUR DISAPPEARING ACT ISN'T CHARMING OR ECCENTRIC...
...IT'S GUTLESS, SERSE.
I... I KNOW.
DANE, I'M SO CONFUSED... EVERYTHING'S SO MUDDLED. I DON'T KNOW HOW IT HAPPENED. NOT REALLY.
I JUST SAW ASTRA LYING THERE... DEAD, AND ANSKAR PONTIFICATING, REVELING IN HIS CRIME...*
...AND I... I...
...KILLED HIM.
STRANGE. I CAN SAY IT, BUT I DON'T REALLY BELIEVE IT. IT ALL SEEMS SO UNREAL. LIKE A BAD DREAM THAT FADES IN THE MORNING LIGHT.
*LAST ISSUE. --R. M.
THIS ISN'T A DREAM.
ANSKAR WAS NO SAINT, BUT, DEAR GOD, SERSE, HE WAS UNARMED. HE WAS--
DANE, I KNOW! DON'T YOU THINK I KNOW?!
I'M... FRIGHTENED.
SOMETHING'S HAPPENING TO ME.
LADY, I'M STILL YOUR FRIEND.
TELL ME.
WHEN I... KILLED ANSKAR, I FELT SUCH A... THRILL RUN THROUGH ME...
...ALMOST AS IF I NEEDED TO DO WHAT I DID.
DANE, HELP ME...
...I THINK I'M GOING INSANE!

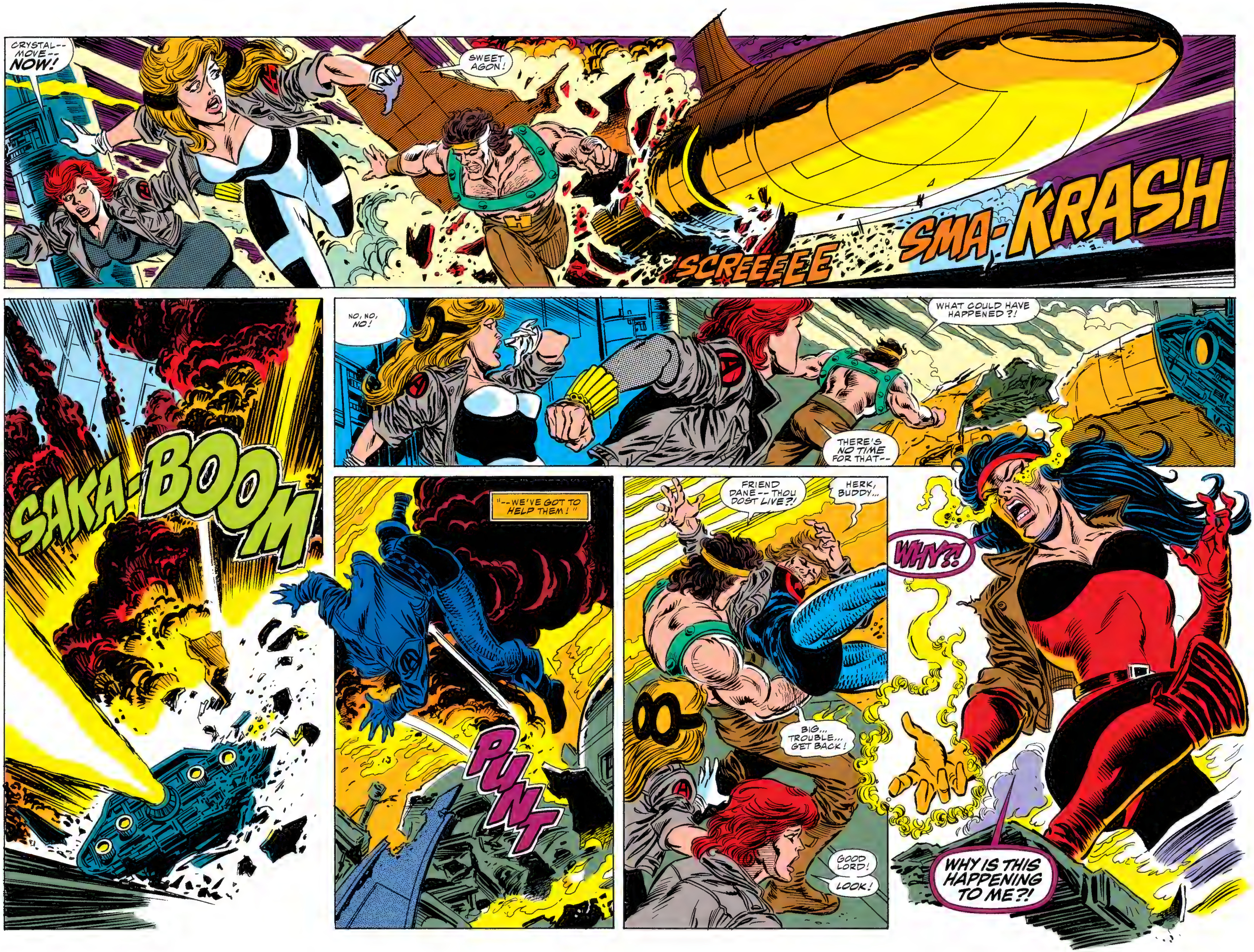

MIDTOWN MANHATTAN.
SIXTEENTH PRECINCT.
WE HIT THE JACKPOT WITH THIS ONE, JOE!
YEAH?
SO TELL ME-- WHAT AM I LOOKIN' AT?
LAB ANALYSIS ON FIBERS WE FOUND ON THE LATEST VICTIM KILLED ON THE DOCKS.
AT FIRST, WE COULDN'T FIGURE WHAT THEY WERE. DARNDEST THINGS WE'D EVER SEEN...
...BUT WE RAN 'EM THROUGH THE CODE: BLUE COMPUTER, AND-- BINGO!
UNSTABLE MOLECULES.
UNSTABLE WHAT?
AN ARTIFICIAL FABRIC CREATED BY REED RICHARDS... Y'KNOW, THE STRETCHING GUY IN THE FANTASTIC FOUR?
IT KINDA ADAPTS TO DIFFERENT TYPES O' POWERS. YOU'RE THE HUMAN TORCH, YOUR CLOTHES DON'T BURN. IT'S COOL STUFF.
RICHARDS ONLY LICENSED ITS USE TO A SMALL GROUP O' HEROES, LIKE THE AVENGERS AND THOSE TYPES.
HEY! WHATTA WE SAYIN' HERE, JOE? THE MANIAC WHO'S KILLED SIX MEN IS A SUPER-HERO, FOR PETE'S SAKE?
A BREAK IS A BREAK, TOMAS. AND THEY'RE NOT ALWAYS PLEASANT...
...AND FRANKLY, IF SOMEONE FINGERED MY MOTHER IN THIS CASE, I'D PUT HER IN A LINE-UP.
C'MON, LET'S HAVE A TALK WITH THIS RICHARDS GUY.
YOU CAN EVEN ASK FOR HIS AUTOGRAPH.

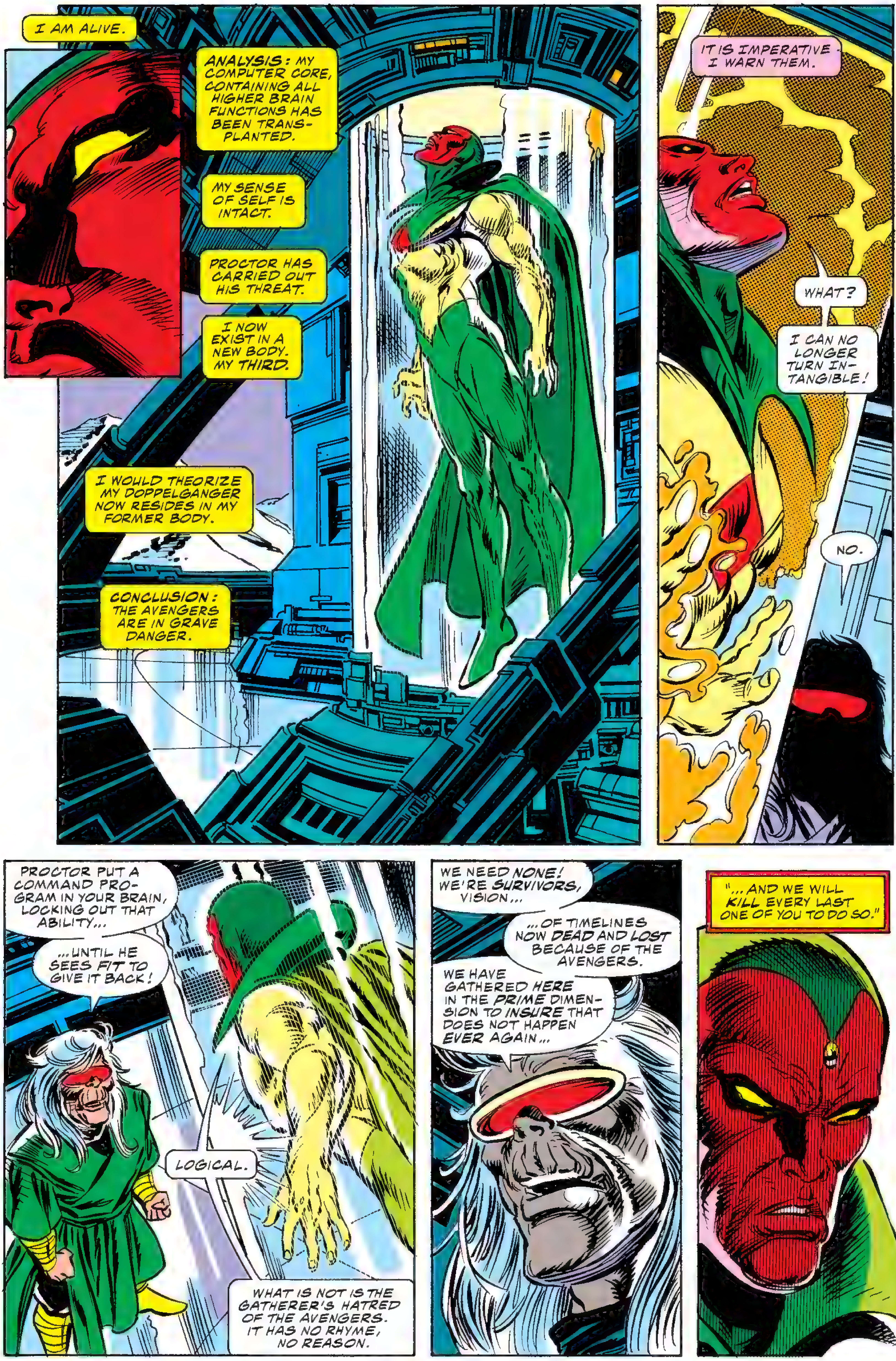

AVENGERS MANSION.
THE MONITOR ROOM.
HERCULES--
--IS THERE ANY WORD FROM DANE YET?
HAS HE FOUND HER?
CRYSTAL--?!
HE HAS, AND I HAVE BEEN TRACKING THEIR RETURN FROM FAR AFRICA. BUT, SWEET LADY--
--THOU HAST A NEW UNIFORM!
IT WAS TIME FOR A CHANGE.
I SEE THEY'LL BE BACK SOON.
HERCULES, HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED?
IS IT GUIDANCE YOU SEEK, CRYSTAL? I CAN GIVE YOU NONE...
...FOR THAT IS A QUESTION EACH MEMBER OF OUR NOBLE ASSEMBLAGE MUST EXAMINE WITHIN HIS OR HER OWN HEART.
BUT-- YEA, I BELIEVE JUSTICE WAS DONE, ON POLEMACHUS AS ON HALA.*
HALA...
*SEE ISSUE #344--RALF
...WHERE DANE KILLED THE SUPREME INTELLIGENCE...
...AND NOW HE'S WITH SERSI...
HERCULES, I HAVE A VERY BAD FEELING ABOUT THIS.

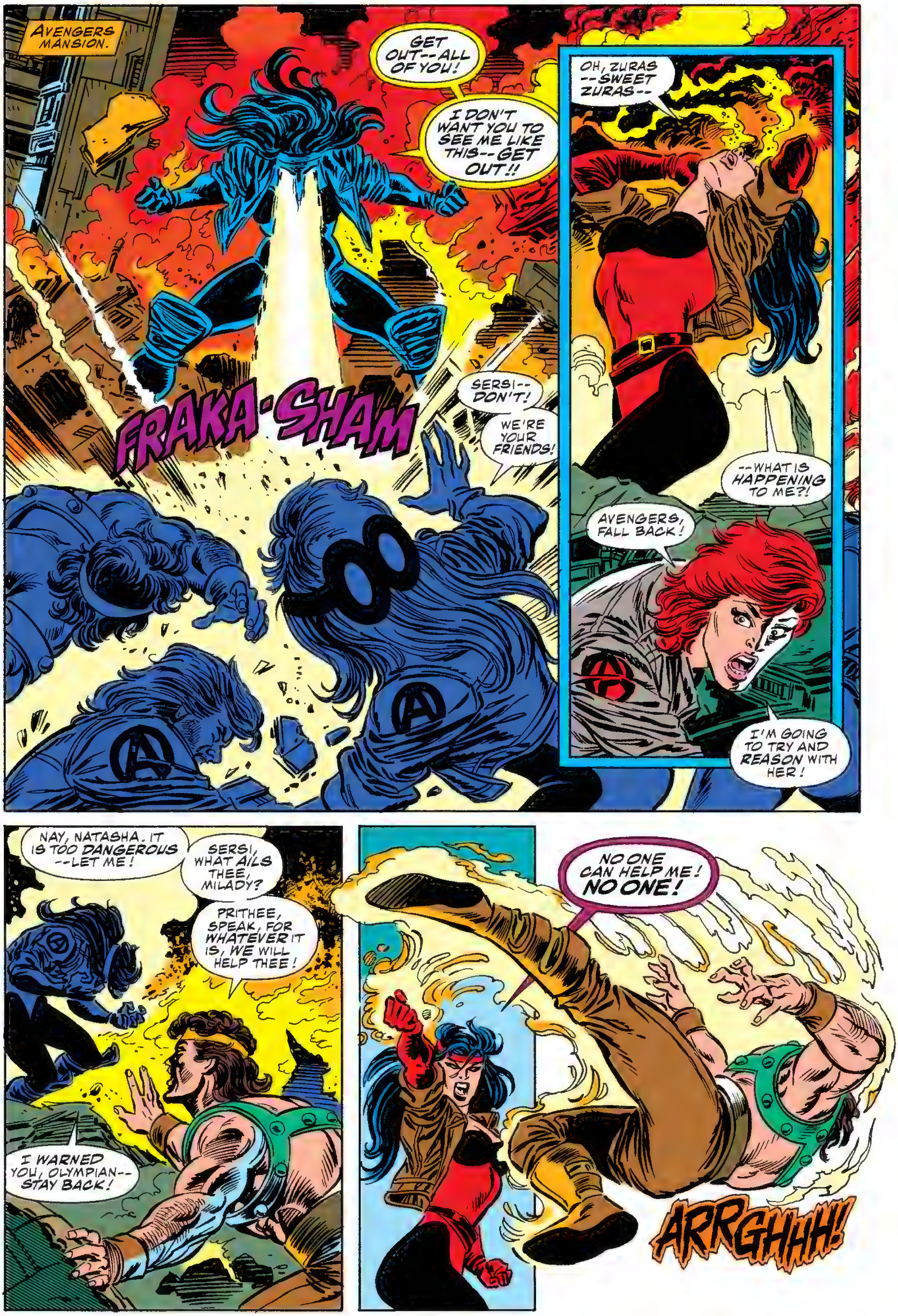

I USED TO THINK BEING AN AVENGER MEANT *HELPING*, DOING *GOOD*, NOW--
THE WORLD IS A *DANGEROUS* PLACE, CRYSTAL...
...AND GOOD DEEDS OFTTIMES HAVE A BITTER *PRICE*!
BREET! THIS IS THE **BLACK WIDOW** *IN THE HANGAR BAY! WE HAVE A... ER... SITUATION UP HERE AND I NEED SOME HELP* **FAST!**
ON OUR WAY, *NATASHA*!
SERSE, WE'RE ALMOST HOME...
...*TALK* TO ME, LADY!
WHAT'S LEFT TO SAY, DANE?
I'M A KILLER, AND THE AVENGERS *FROWN* ON KILLERS.
I'M *SUCH* A DISAPPOINTMENT.
PUTTING UP THE BORED, PATRICIAN FACADE ISN'T GOING TO HELP.
I'VE *BEEN* WHERE YOU ARE. LET ME IN.
DANE, I WOULD IF I--
OH, SWEET ZURAS--
--NOT *NOW*!
SERSE?
DANE-- GET OUT!
BY ALL THAT'S HOLY-- GET OUT!

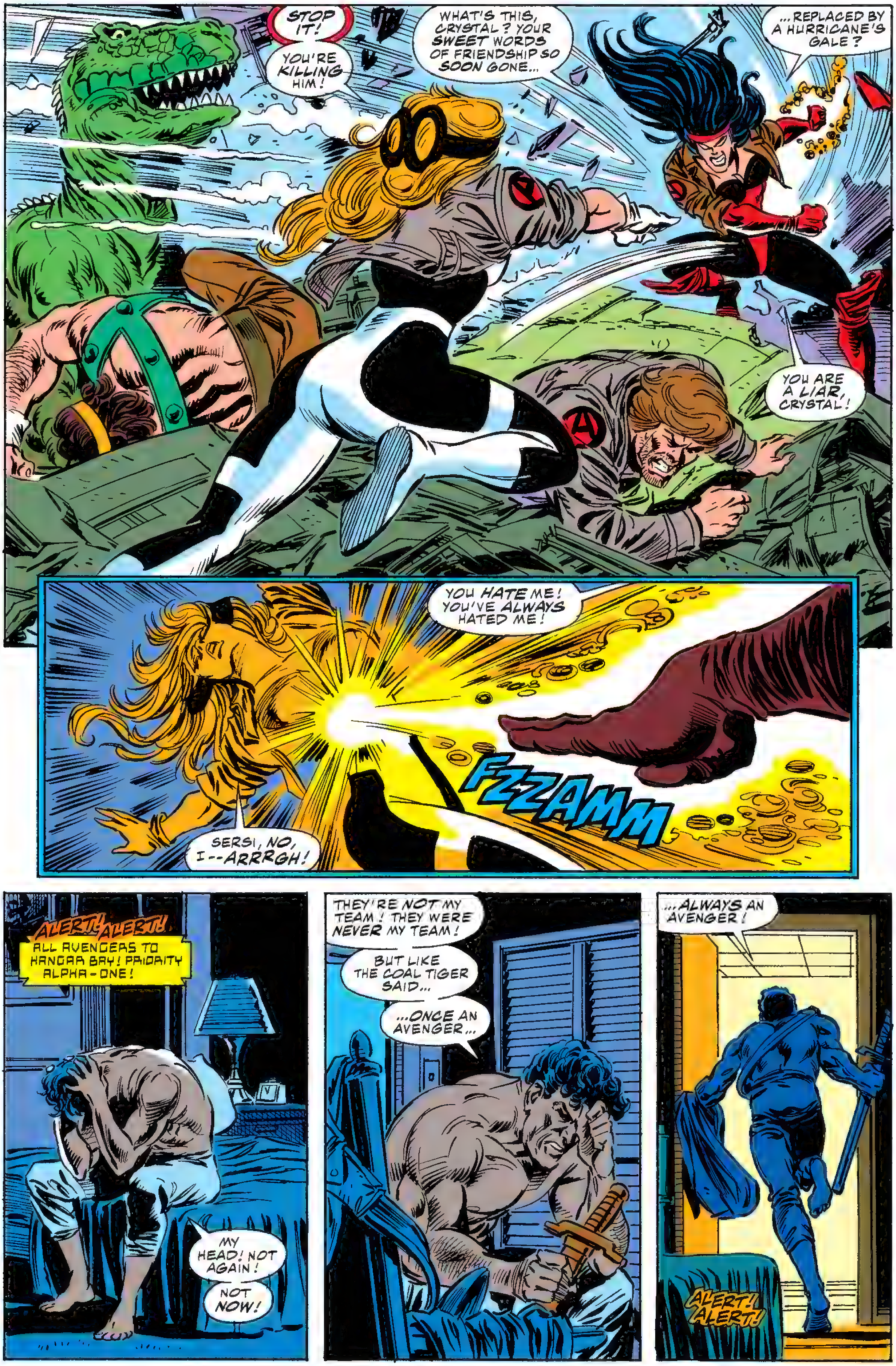

MANHATTAN.
VMMMMM
THE WONDERS OF THE CITY!
IT NEVER FAILS TO INSPIRE...
...THIS PLACE OF FISSION, WHERE THE BEST OF HUMANITY CONFRONTS THE WORST...
...AND YOU ARE NO STRANGER TO THE WORST OF THINGS, ARE YOU?
PROCTOR, YOU WOUND ME.
I BARELY HAD TIME TO ADJUST TO THIS NEW BODY BEFORE YOU YANKED ME HERE...
...AND NOW INSULTS? AND I, YOUR HUMBLE SERVANT!
I WARN YOU-- DON'T MOCK ME, GATHERER!
IT CAN ONLY LEAD TO A SHORT LIFE FOR YOU.
ARGHH!
DO WHAT I WOULD HAVE YOU DO, VISION...
...KILL THE SWORDSMAN BEFORE HE HAS A CHANCE TO REMEMBER TOO MUCH OF HIS TIME WITH ME...
...AND DO IT QUICKLY!
YOU SHOULD ENJOY IT, YOU HAVE A TALENT-- WHAT?
SCREEE
SO IT TRULY BEGINS.
HURRY, VISION. BE ABOUT YOUR TASK...
...I THINK I CAN PROMISE YOU...


"...A MOMENTOUS ENTRY!"
SZZZZZ
EASY, GIRL, EASY!
ER... HERCULES?
I DON'T WANT HER HURT!
DOWN, LOCKJAW!
YOU KNOW KARIA IS NO THREAT. ARKON LEFT HER HERE FOR US TO TAKE CARE OF!
TASHA, I'M SORRY ABOUT THIS!
FEAR NOT, NATASHA... I HAVE THE MATTER WELL IN HAND!
GRRRRRR
IT'S ALL RIGHT, CRYS...
...THINGS SEEM TO HAVE SETTLED DOWN THANKS TO HERCULES!
FOR ONE WHO ONCE TAMED THE MAD BULL OF CRETE...
...'TWAS NOTHING!
AROOGAH!
AROOGAH!
DANE'S SHIP? WHAT--?!
QUINJET APPROACHING AT SPEED IN EXCESS OF SAFETY PARAMETERS.
ADVISE ALL PERSONNEL TO EVACUATE HANGAR BAY AT ONCE!

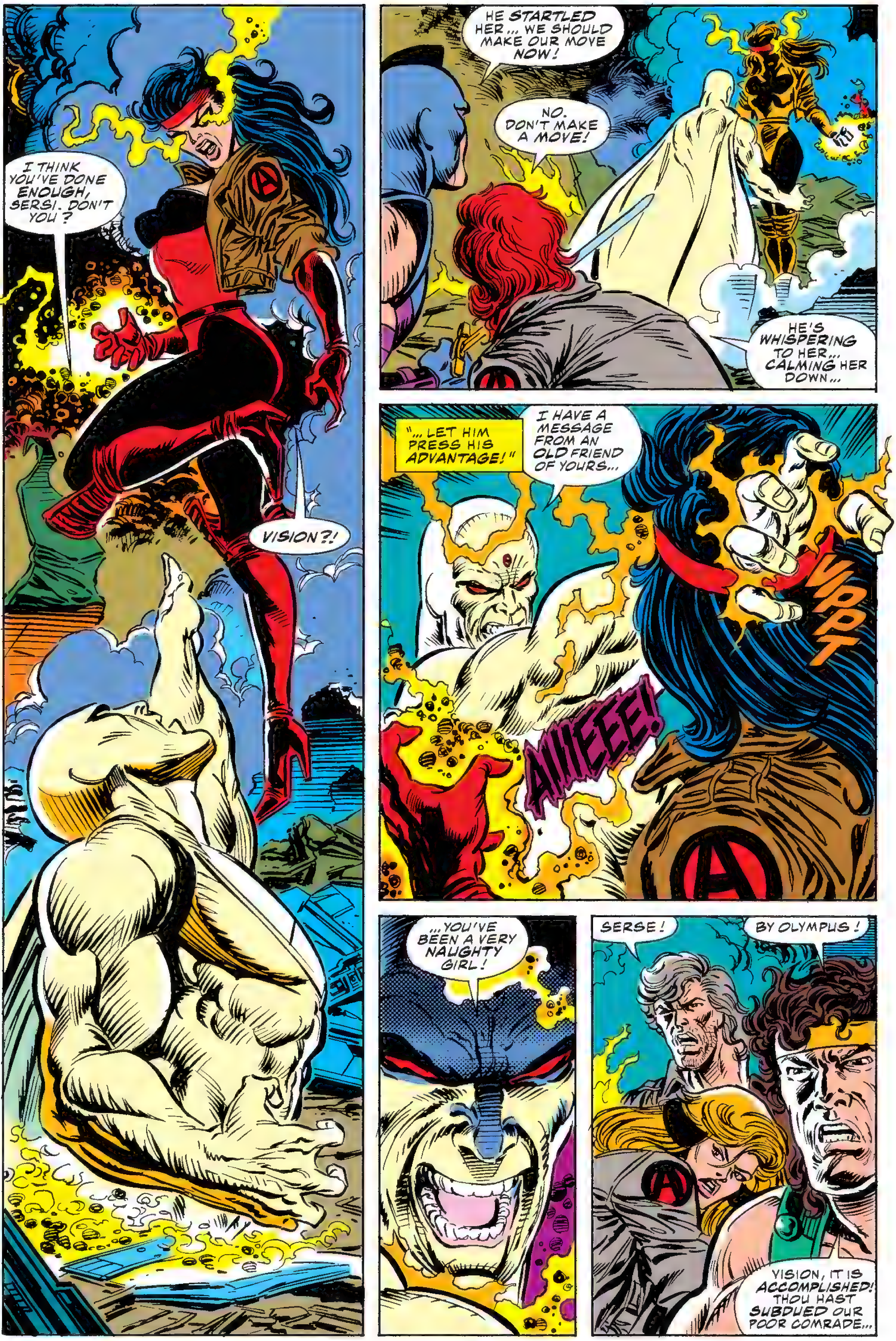

CRYSTAL-- MOVE-- NOW!
SWEET AGON!
SCREEEEEE
SMA-KRASH
SAKA-BOOM
NO, NO, NO!
WHAT COULD HAVE HAPPENED?!
THERE'S NO TIME FOR THAT--
"--WE'VE GOT TO HELP THEM!"
PUNT
FRIEND DANE -- THOU DOST LIVE?!
HERK, BUDDY...
BIG... TROUBLE... GET BACK!
GOOD LORD!
LOOK!
WHY?!
WHY IS THIS HAPPENING TO ME?!

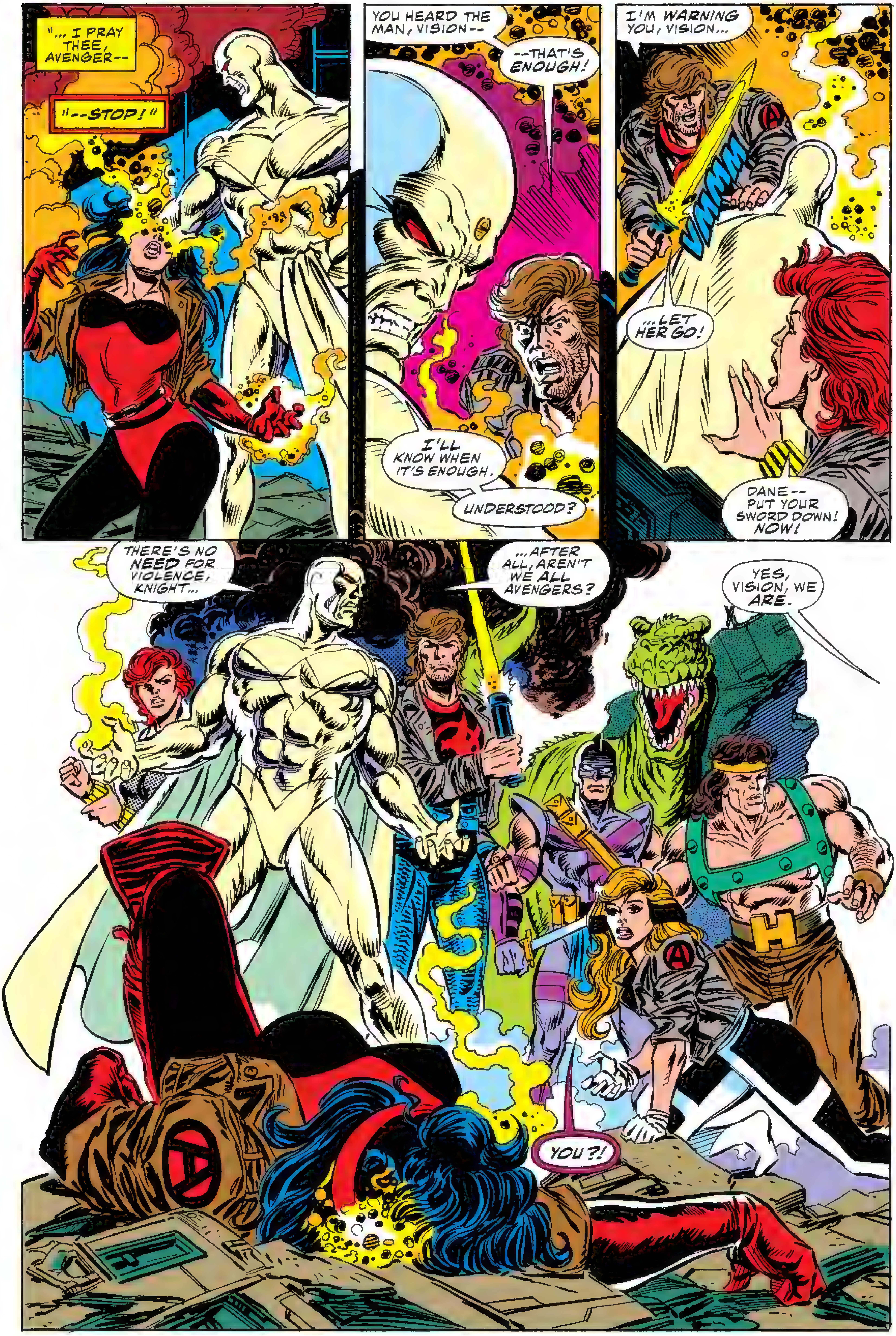

I AM ALIVE.
ANALYSIS: MY COMPUTER CORE, CONTAINING ALL HIGHER BRAIN FUNCTIONS HAS BEEN TRANSPLANTED.
MY SENSE OF SELF IS INTACT.
PROCTOR HAS CARRIED OUT HIS THREAT.
I NOW EXIST IN A NEW BODY. MY THIRD.
I WOULD THEORIZE MY DOPPELGANGER NOW RESIDES IN MY FORMER BODY.
CONCLUSION: THE AVENGERS ARE IN GRAVE DANGER.
IT IS IMPERATIVE I WARN THEM.
WHAT?
I CAN NO LONGER TURN INTANGIBLE!
NO.
PROCTOR PUT A COMMAND PROGRAM IN YOUR BRAIN, LOCKING OUT THAT ABILITY...
...UNTIL HE SEES FIT TO GIVE IT BACK!
LOGICAL.
WHAT IS NOT IS THE GATHERER'S HATRED OF THE AVENGERS. IT HAS NO RHYME, NO REASON.
WE NEED NONE! WE'RE SURVIVORS, VISION...
...OF TIMELINES NOW DEAD AND LOST BECAUSE OF THE AVENGERS.
WE HAVE GATHERED HERE IN THE PRIME DIMENSION TO INSURE THAT DOES NOT HAPPEN EVER AGAIN...
"...AND WE WILL KILL EVERY LAST ONE OF YOU TO DO SO."

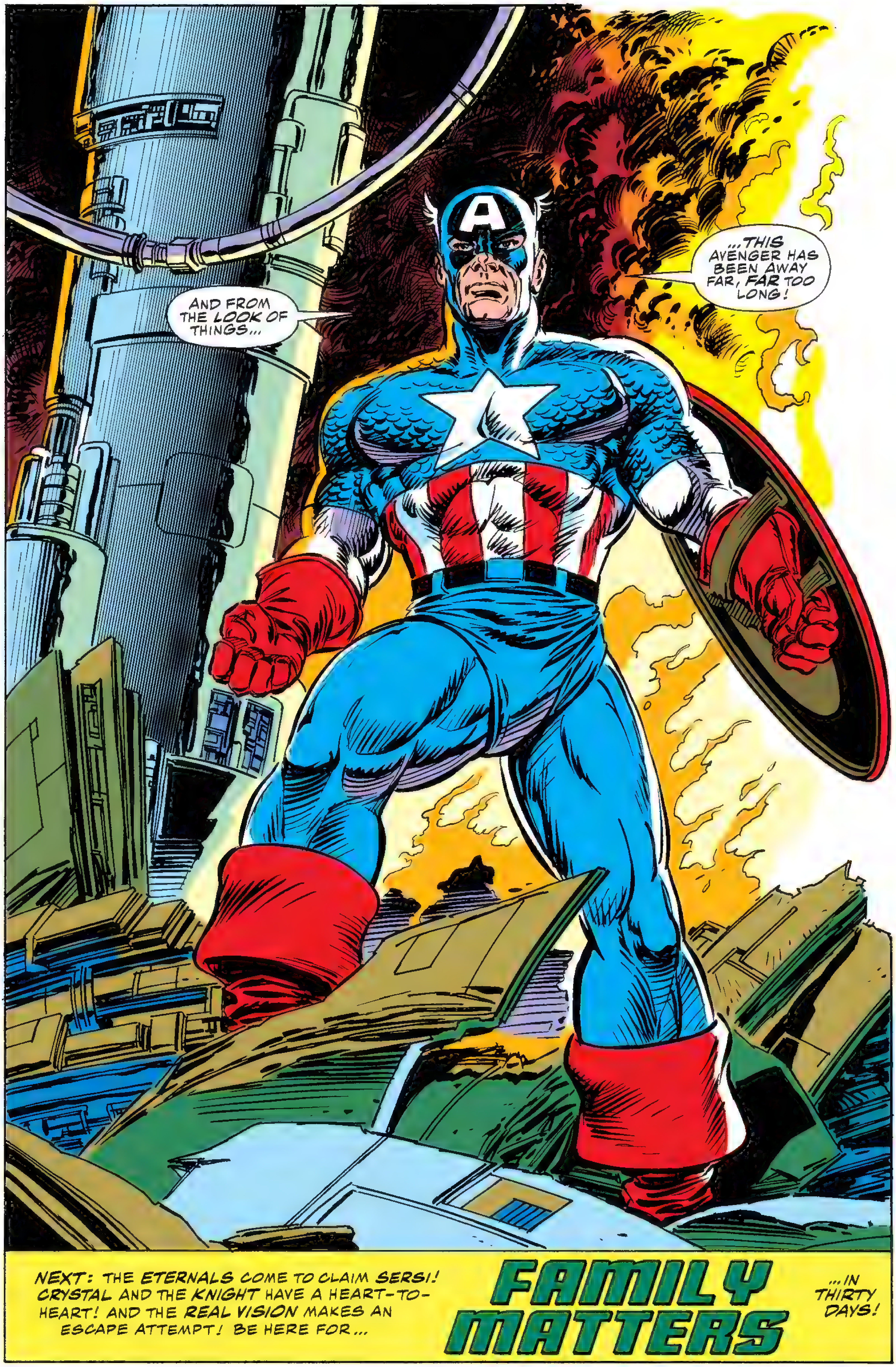

AVENGERS MANSION.
GET OUT--ALL OF YOU!
I DON'T WANT YOU TO SEE ME LIKE THIS--GET OUT!!
FRAKA-SHAM
SERSI--DON'T!
WE'RE YOUR FRIENDS!
OH, ZURAS--SWEET ZURAS--
--WHAT IS HAPPENING TO ME?!
AVENGERS, FALL BACK!
I'M GOING TO TRY AND REASON WITH HER!
NAY, NATASHA. IT IS TOO DANGEROUS--LET ME!
SERSI, WHAT AILS THEE, MILADY?
PRITHEE, SPEAK, FOR WHATEVER IT IS, WE WILL HELP THEE!
I WARNED YOU, OLYMPIAN--STAY BACK!
NO ONE CAN HELP ME! NO ONE!
ARRGHHH!

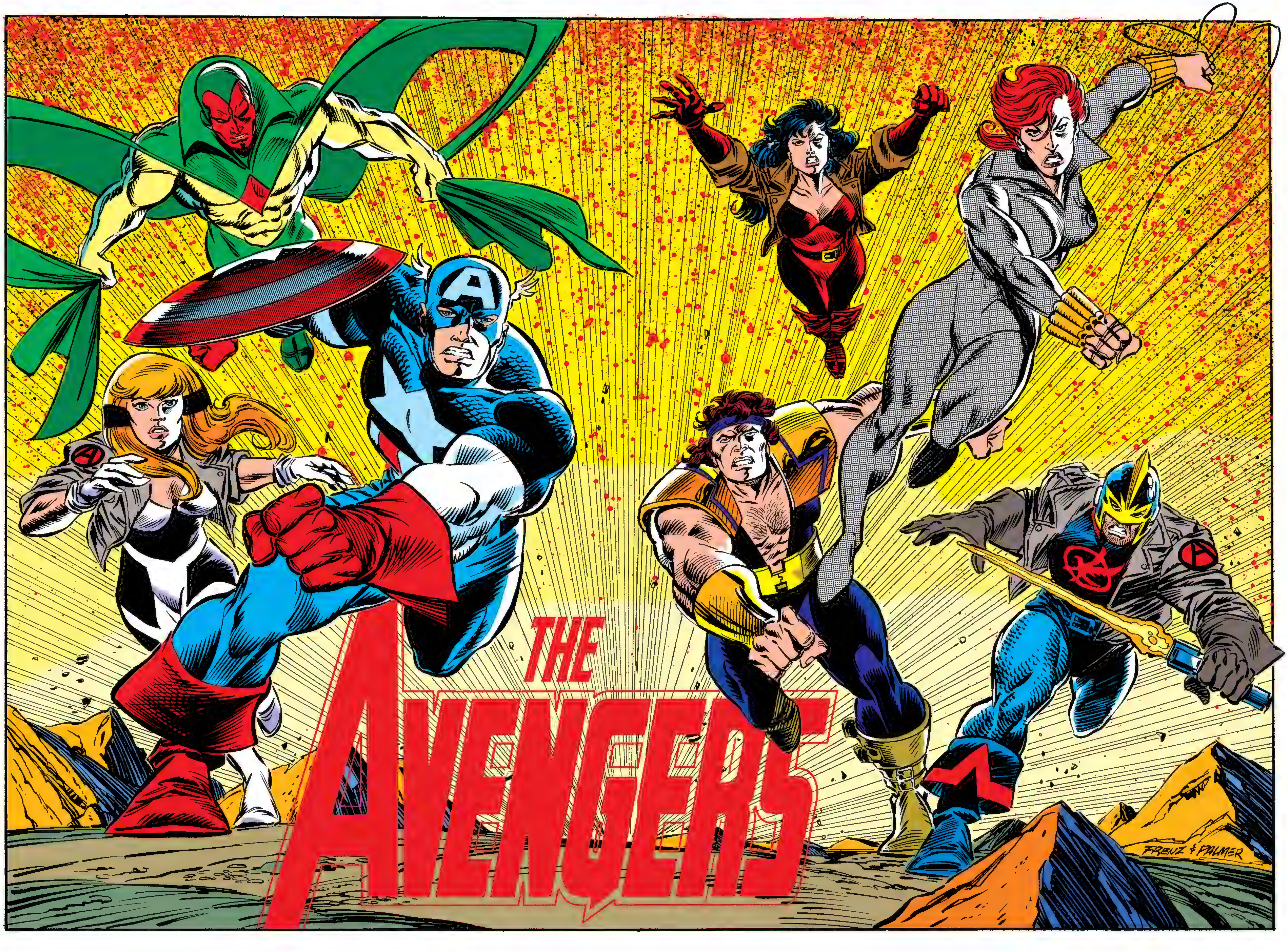

STOP IT!
YOU'RE KILLING HIM!
WHAT'S THIS, CRYSTAL? YOUR SWEET WORDS OF FRIENDSHIP SO SOON GONE...
...REPLACED BY A HURRICANE'S GALE?
YOU ARE A LIAR, CRYSTAL!
YOU HATE ME! YOU'VE ALWAYS HATED ME!
FZZAMM
SERSI, NO, I--ARRRGH!
ALERT! ALERT!
ALL AVENGERS TO HANGAR BAY! PRIORITY ALPHA-ONE!
MY HEAD! NOT AGAIN!
NOT NOW!
THEY'RE NOT MY TEAM! THEY WERE NEVER MY TEAM!
BUT LIKE THE COAL TIGER SAID...
...ONCE AN AVENGER...
...ALWAYS AN AVENGER!
ALERT! ALERT!

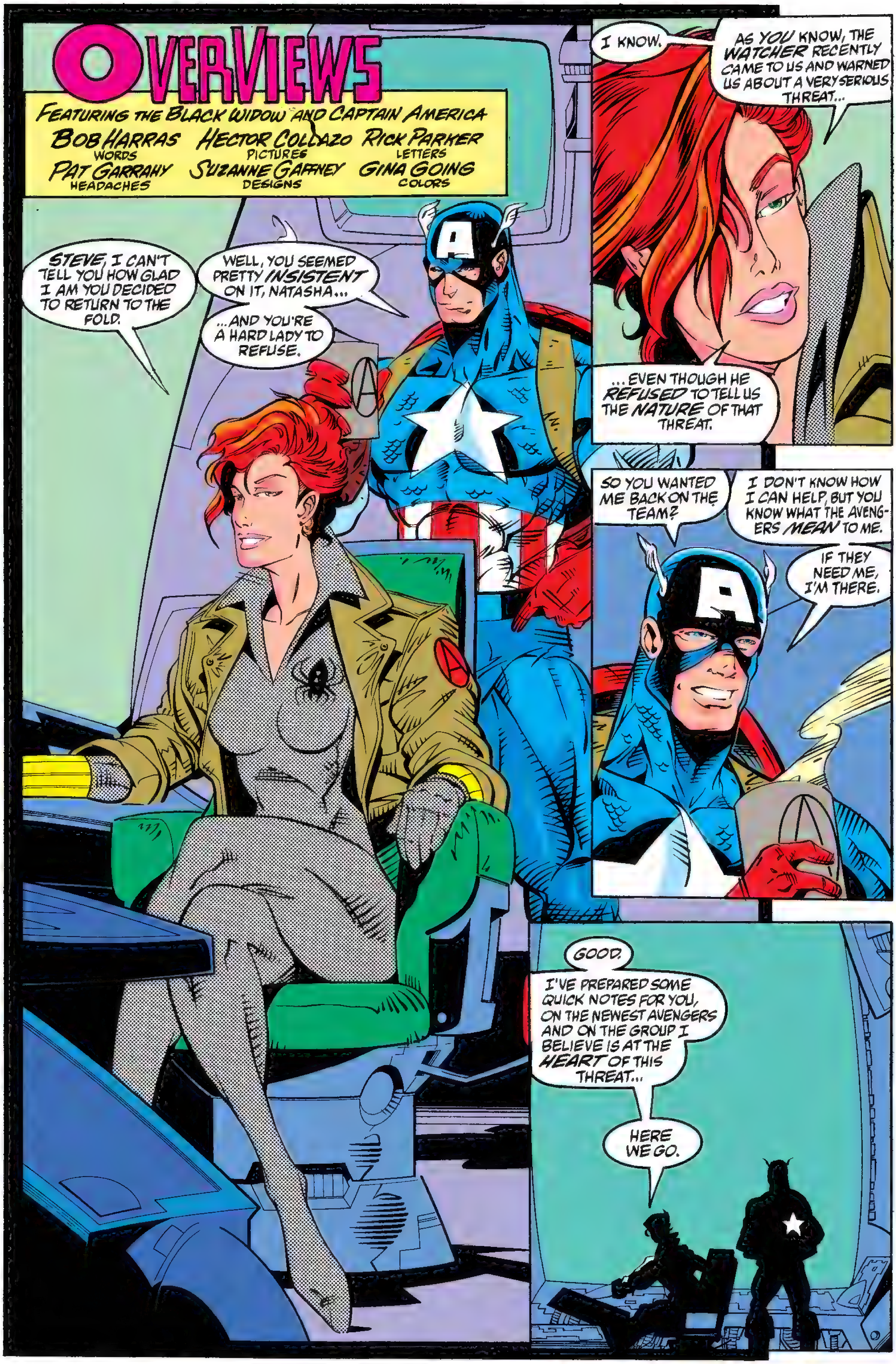
GOOD LORD!
DON'T FORCE ME TO HURT YOU, NATASHA!
SERSI, NO ONE'S FORCING YOU TO DO ANYTHING! STOP THIS MADNESS!
YOU'RE IN OBVIOUS PAIN. YOU'VE GOT TO LET US HELP YOU!
WIDOW, SHE'S SERIOUS! GET BACK!
LISTEN TO THE KNIGHT--
--HE KNOWS WHAT HE'S SAYING!
SM-KRASH!
WHA--?! SWORDSMAN?!
I WARN YOU ALL--
--I CAN BREAK EACH AND EVERY ONE OF YOU DOWN MOLECULE BY MOLECULE! I--

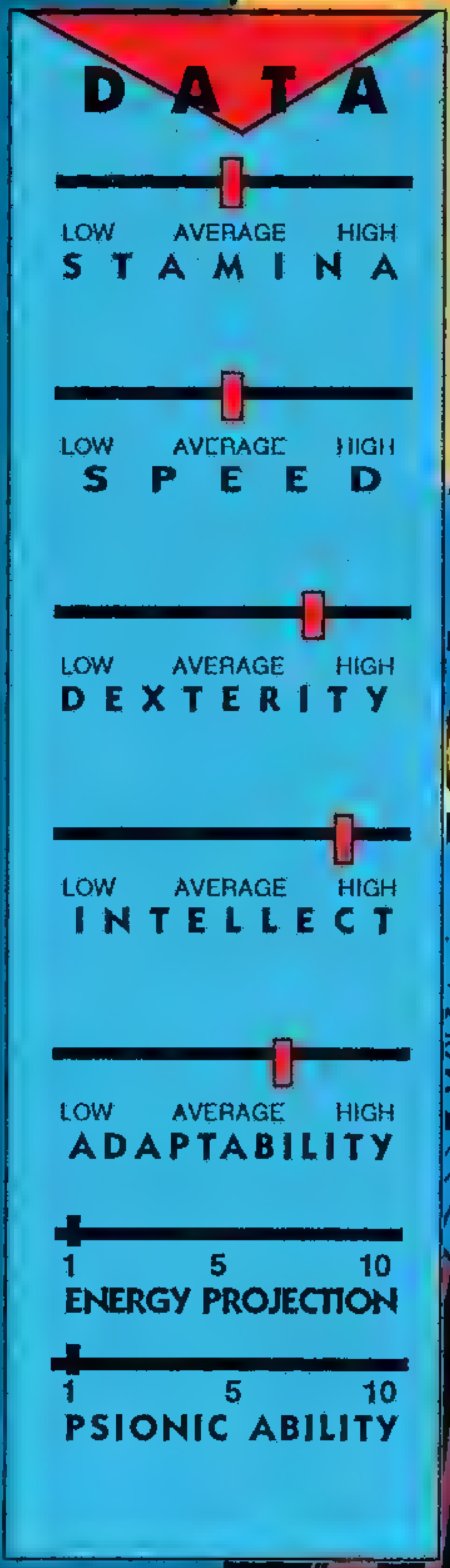

I THINK YOU'VE DONE ENOUGH, SERSI. DON'T YOU?
VISION?!
HE STARTLED HER... WE SHOULD MAKE OUR MOVE NOW!
NO. DON'T MAKE A MOVE!
HE'S WHISPERING TO HER... CALMING HER DOWN...
"...LET HIM PRESS HIS ADVANTAGE!"
I HAVE A MESSAGE FROM AN OLD FRIEND OF YOURS...
WIPP
AIIIEEE!
...YOU'VE BEEN A VERY NAUGHTY GIRL!
SERSE!
BY OLYMPUS!
VISION, IT IS ACCOMPLISHED! THOU HAST SUBDUED OUR POOR COMRADE...

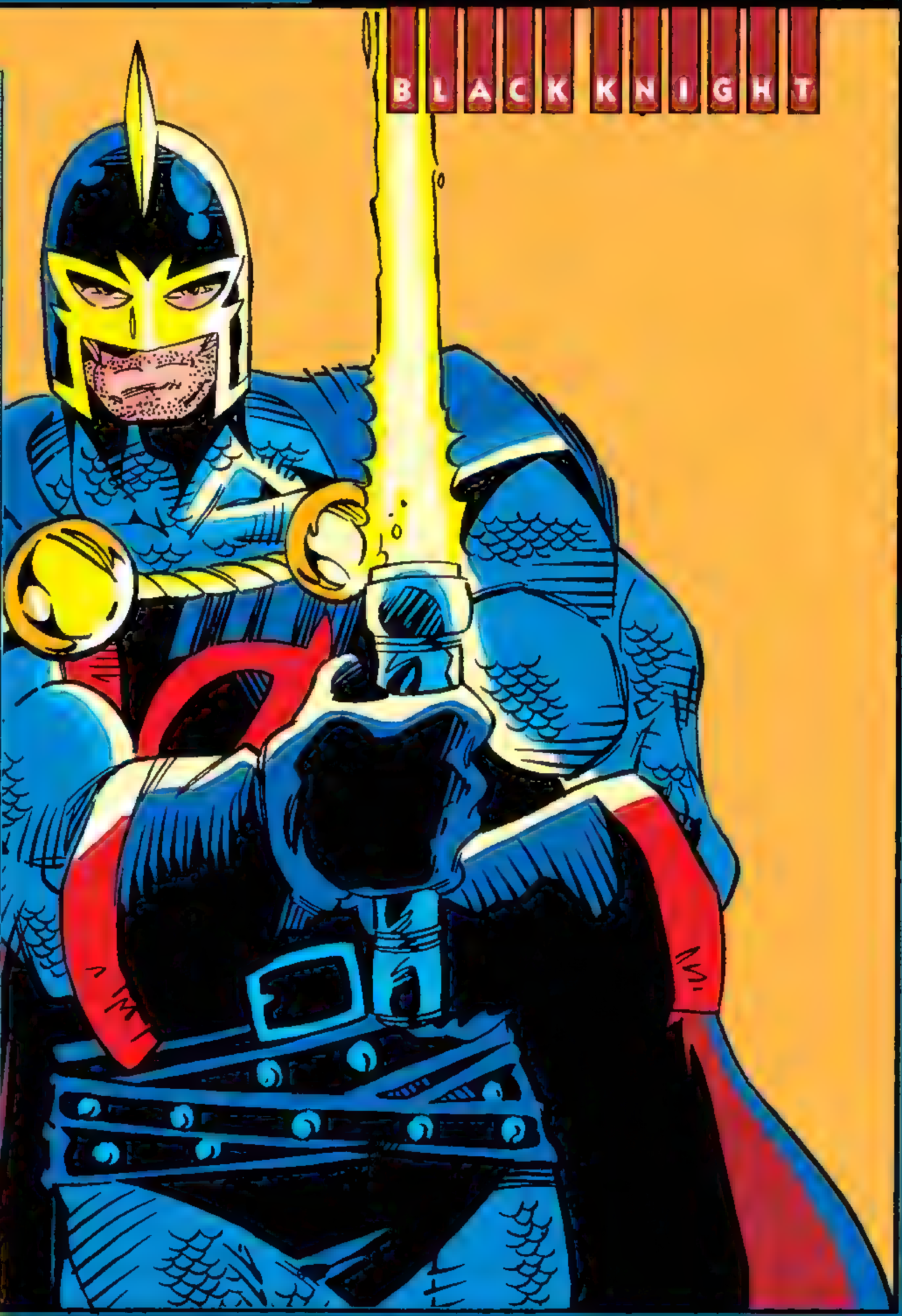

"... I PRAY THEE, AVENGER--
"--STOP!"
YOU HEARD THE MAN, VISION--
--THAT'S ENOUGH!
I'LL KNOW WHEN IT'S ENOUGH.
UNDERSTOOD?
I'M WARNING YOU, VISION...
VMMMM
...LET HER GO!
DANE-- PUT YOUR SWORD DOWN! NOW!
THERE'S NO NEED FOR VIOLENCE, KNIGHT...
...AFTER ALL, AREN'T WE ALL AVENGERS?
YES, VISION, WE ARE.
YOU?!

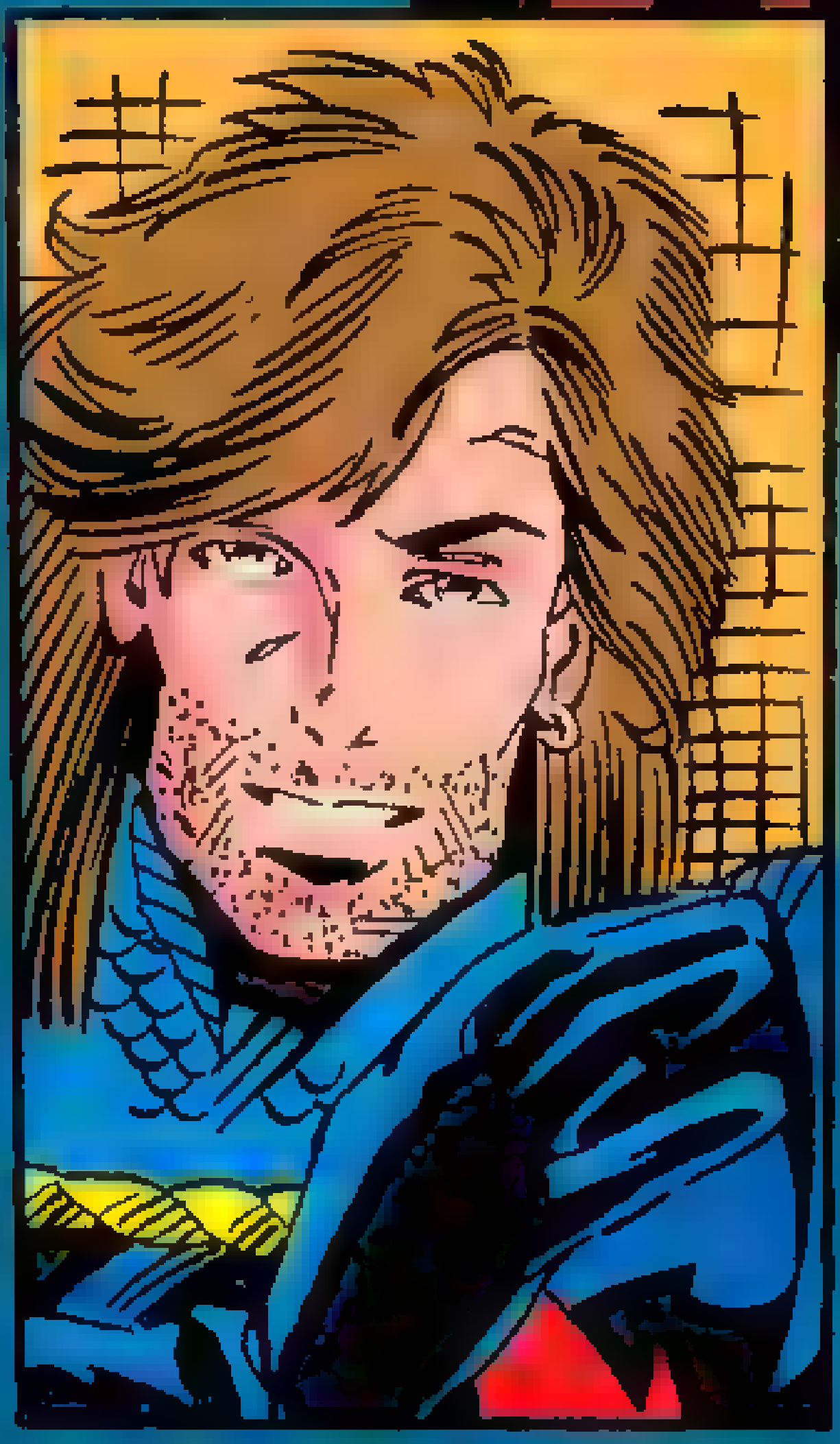

AND FROM THE *LOOK* OF THINGS...
...THIS AVENGER HAS BEEN AWAY FAR, *FAR* TOO LONG!
NEXT: THE *ETERNALS* COME TO CLAIM *SERSI! CRYSTAL* AND THE *KNIGHT* HAVE A HEART-TO-HEART! AND THE *REAL VISION* MAKES AN ESCAPE ATTEMPT! BE HERE FOR...
FAMILY MATTERS
...IN THIRTY DAYS!


THE AVENGERS
FRENZ & PALMER


OverViews
FEATURING THE BLACK WIDOW AND CAPTAIN AMERICA
BOB HARRAS WORDS
HECTOR COLLAZO PICTURES
RICK PARKER LETTERS
PAT GARRAHY HEADACHES
SUZANNE GAFFNEY DESIGNS
GINA GOING COLORS
STEVE, I CAN'T TELL YOU HOW GLAD I AM YOU DECIDED TO RETURN TO THE FOLD.
WELL, YOU SEEMED PRETTY INSISTENT ON IT, NATASHA...
...AND YOU'RE A HARD LADY TO REFUSE.
I KNOW.
AS YOU KNOW, THE WATCHER RECENTLY CAME TO US AND WARNED US ABOUT A VERY SERIOUS THREAT...
...EVEN THOUGH HE REFUSED TO TELL US THE NATURE OF THAT THREAT.
SO YOU WANTED ME BACK ON THE TEAM?
I DON'T KNOW HOW I CAN HELP, BUT YOU KNOW WHAT THE AVENGERS MEAN TO ME.
IF THEY NEED ME, I'M THERE.
GOOD.
I'VE PREPARED SOME QUICK NOTES FOR YOU, ON THE NEWEST AVENGERS AND ON THE GROUP I BELIEVE IS AT THE HEART OF THIS THREAT...
HERE WE GO.







BLACK KNIGHT

Dane Whitman, the Black Knight, is, with the exception of Hercules, the most senior member on the team's current roster.

However, unlike his previous tenures on the Avengers, which were usually extremely short-term in nature, Dane has now became a mainstay of the team. Indeed, he has assumed the role of our de facto field commander.

This change in status is mirrored by a seeming metamorphosis in character. Whereas the Black Knight I first met was more the scientist than the super hero—and he is considered one of this country's foremost scientific minds—the Dane of today is an impatient, tough-minded, almost brash individual. Nowhere was this more evident than on Hala, where he joined those Avengers in choosing to exterminate the Supreme Intelligence--even though that is a decision I believe haunts him.

Dane has told me that his enforced sojourn to the twelfth century, where he unwillingly lived for five years, plus the deadly blood curse of his original Ebony Blade has made him view life differently. Knowing firsthand that existence can change radically at a moment's notice, he firmly believes in seizing that moment and living it to the utmost. Going hand in hand with that view, I fear, is a tendency to ignore rules...a dangerous trend in a group such as ours.

Still, despite these fears, it cannot be denied, and it cannot be stressed enough that Dane is an excellent Avenger, but I still have a concern... I would say almost a premonition if I believed in such things... that Dane's bravado will lead to tragedy.

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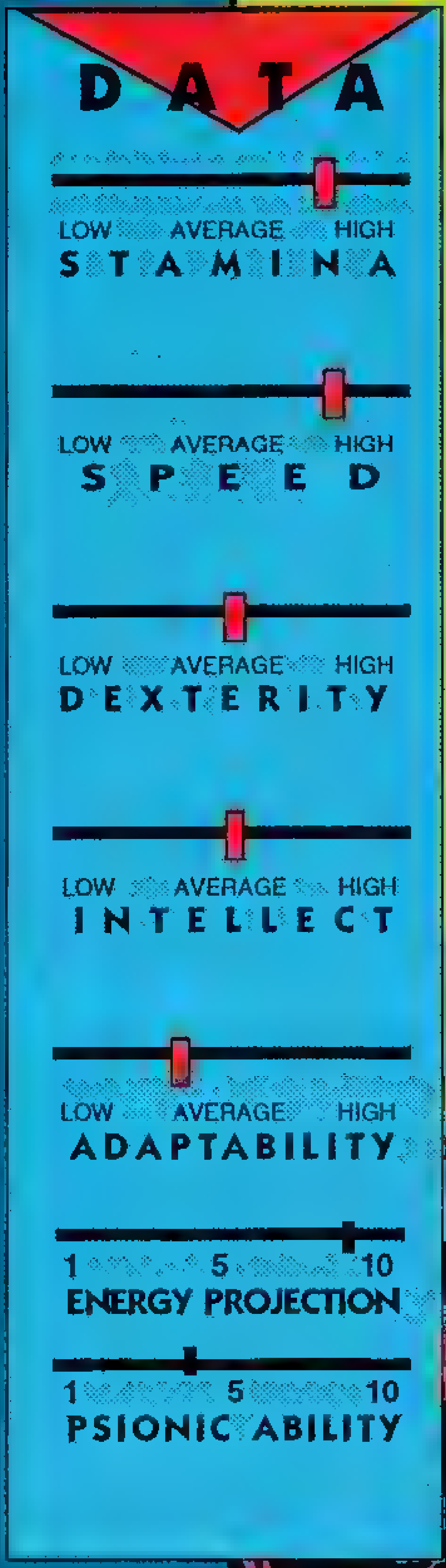
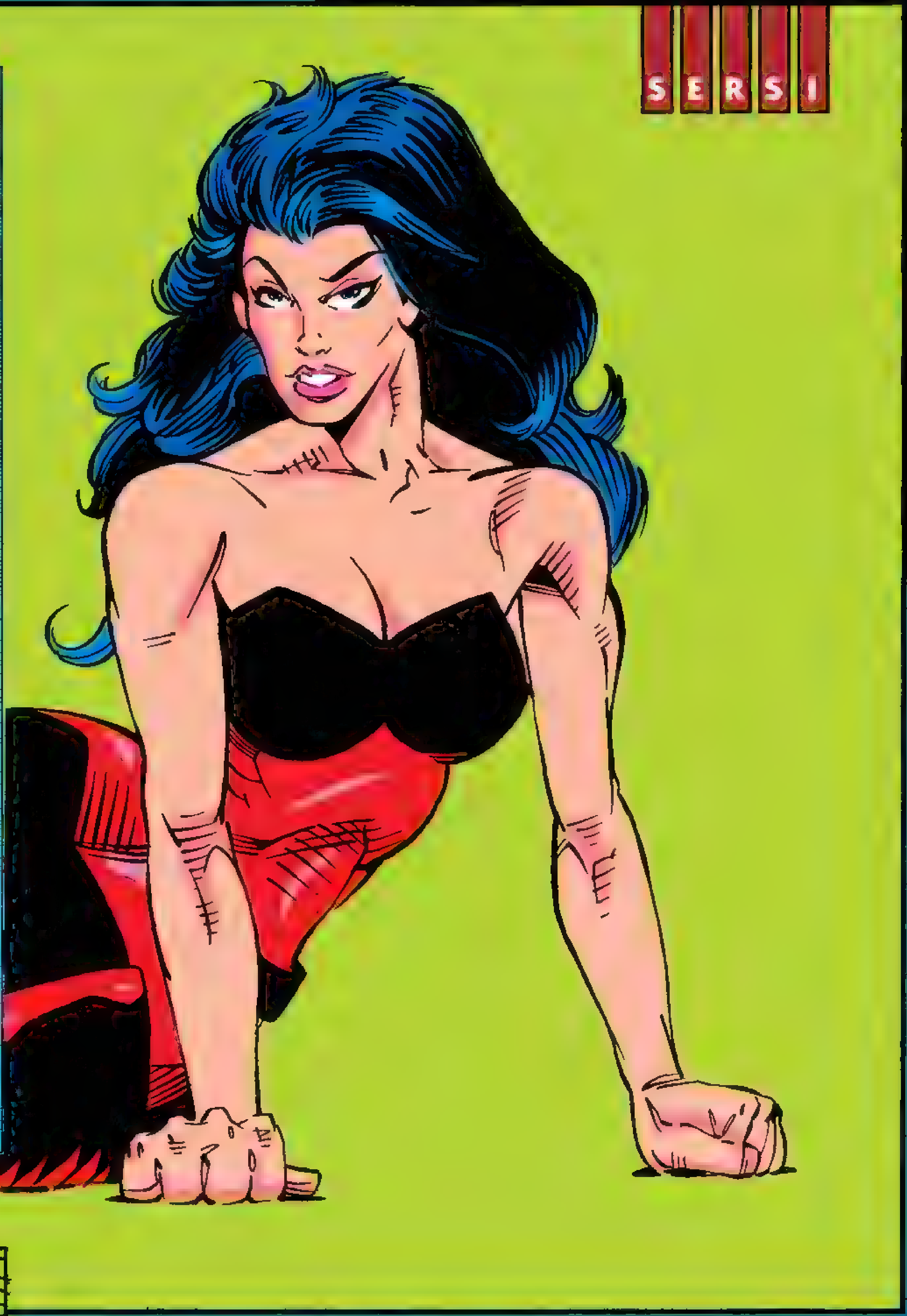
AVENGERS FILE





SERSI

Of all the Avengers, I find Sersi the most enigmatic. Even before the incident on Polemachus, I found myself with doubts concerning her membership.

Her biography does not indicate any reason, nor clue, as to why this most flamboyant of women would want to be an Avenger.

Sersi is an Eternal, a sub-species of humanity that is extremely long-lived (a lifetime of several thousand years is the norm) and blessed with extraordinary powers. But even among her own people, Sersi was always an outsider, deciding to live among normal humans rather than in their enclave on Olympia.

She was known in the New York social scene as the city's most flamboyant hostess. Invitations to her parties were much sought after among the rich and powerful, and Sersi seemed to enjoy that role and played it to the utmost. The cares and concerns of most members seemed not to bother her in the least. And yet she joined the Avengers.

And after joining, she proved a most worthy ally. Until Anskar's death only her unexplained absences caused any concern. Now, of course, that has all changed... and Sersi presents us with the most difficult dilemma we've faced in a long, long time. Indeed, she forces us to ponder what the very nature of being an "Avenger" means in this harsher day and age.

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AVENGERS FILE

CRYSTAL

DATA

LOW AVERAGE HIGH
STAMINA

LOW AVERAGE HIGH
SPEED

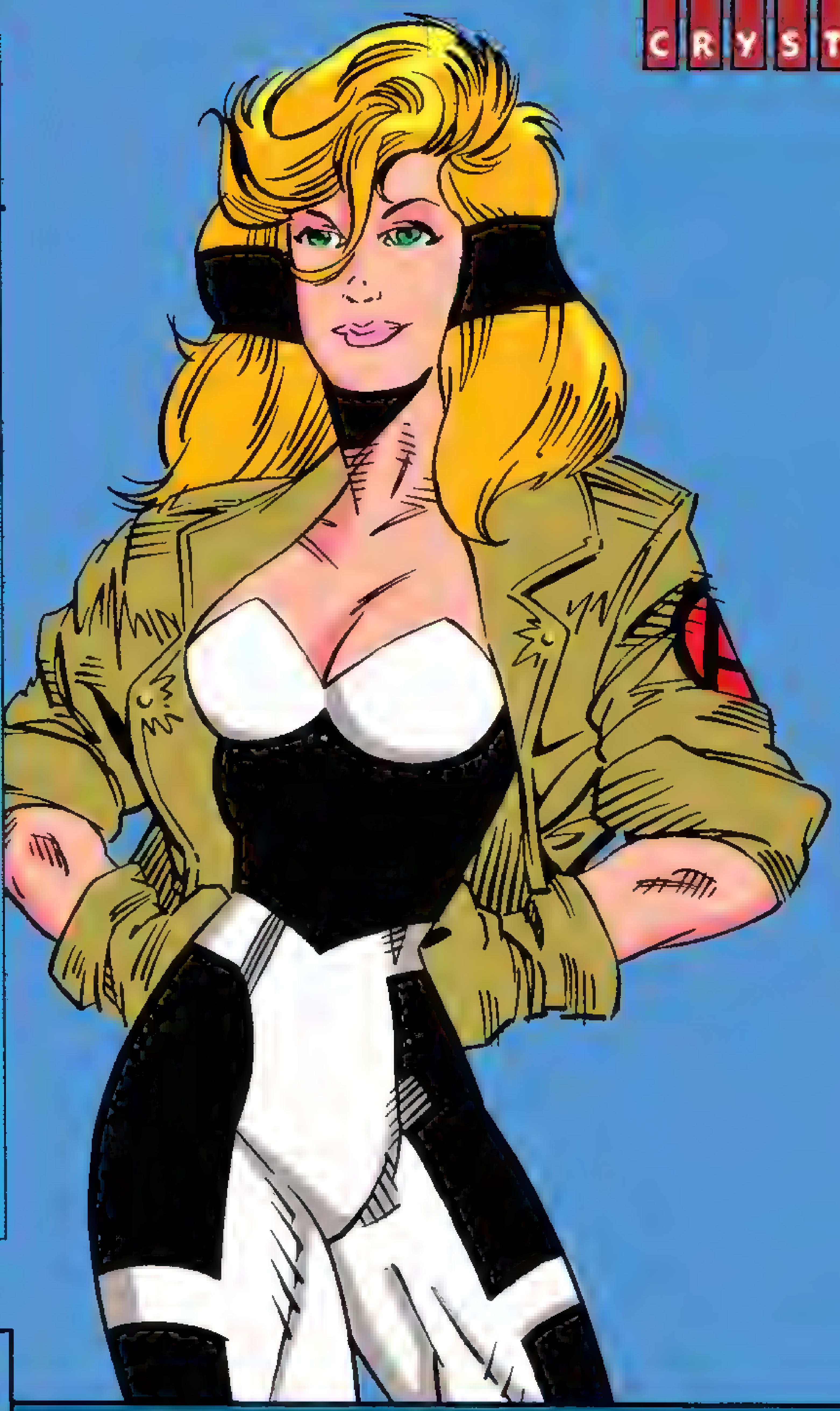
LOW AVERAGE HIGH
DEXTERITY

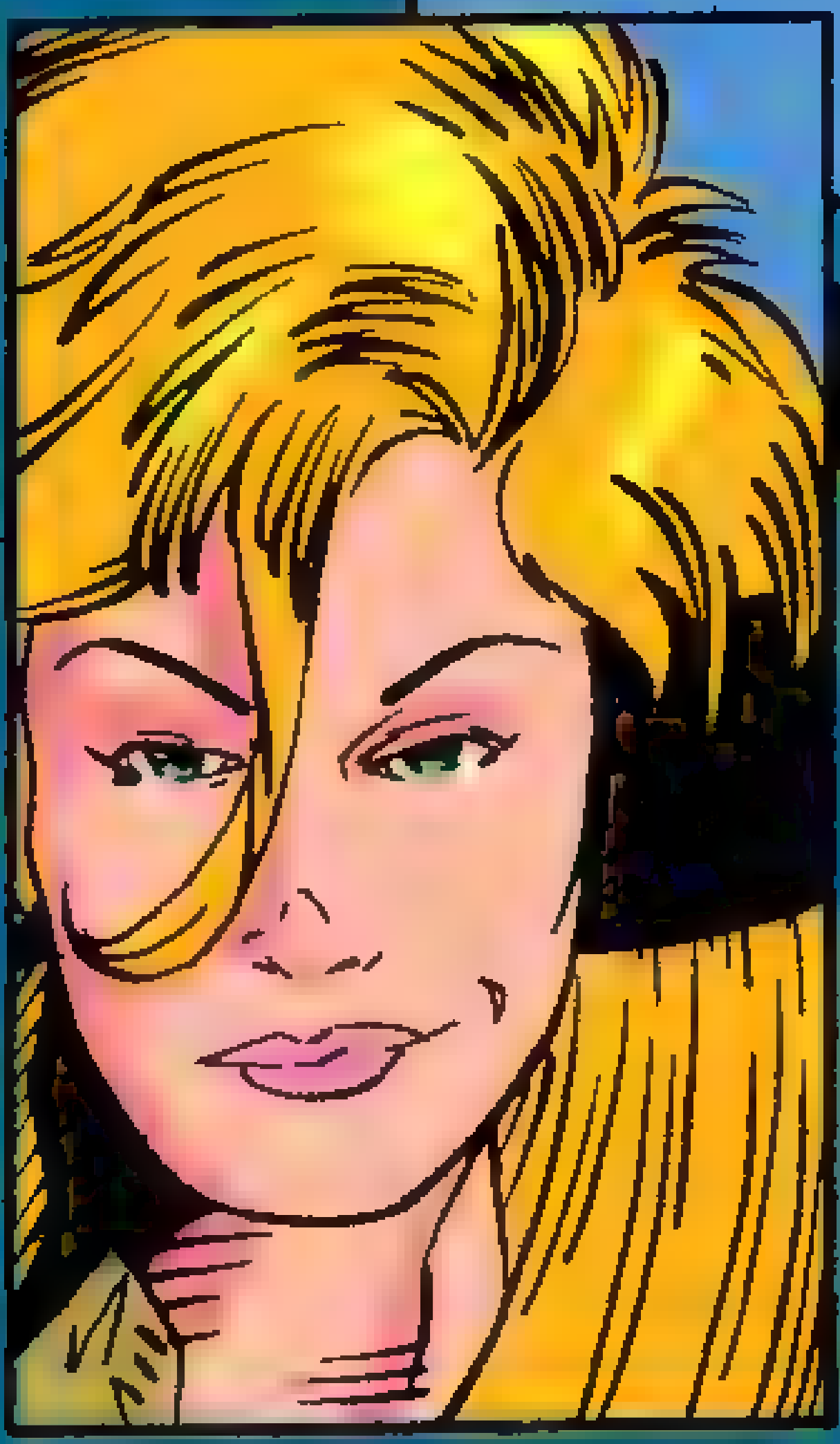
LOW AVERAGE HIGH
INTELLECT

LOW AVERAGE HIGH
ADAPTABILITY

1 5 10
ENERGY PROJECTION

1 5 10
PSIONIC ABILITY





CRYSTAL

CRYSTAL IS OUR NEWEST AVENGER, BUT HAVING BEEN BORN INTO THE ROYAL FAMILY OF THE INHUMANS AND A MEMBER OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR, SHE CERTAINLY DOES NOT LACK IN EXPERIENCE. I THINK IT IS COMMON KNOWLEDGE SHE JOINED US IN ORDER TO PURGE HERSELF OF GUILT OVER SOME MISTAKES SHE MADE IN HER PERSONAL LIFE, MISTAKES WHICH LED TO HER CURRENT ESTRANGEMENT FROM HER HUSBAND, THE FORMER AVENGER, QUICKSILVER.

WHATEVER HER REASONS, CRYSTAL HAS PROVED TO BE A VALUABLE ADDITION TO THE TEAM. HER ELEMENTAL POWERS HAVE PROVEN A FORMIDABLE ADDITION TO OUR BATTLE STRATEGY.

IN EVERY SENSE, CRYSTAL IS AN EXCELLENT ARGUMENT FOR NEW BLOOD IN THE TEAM. AS A MATTER OF FACT, THE ONLY CLOUD I CAN SEE CONCERNING CRYSTAL'S MEMBERSHIP IS THE INDIRECT THREAT WE RECEIVED VIA THE X-MEN FROM THE FANATICAL MUTANT GROUP CALLED THE ACOLYTES CONCERNING HER HUMAN DAUGHTER, LUNA, GRANDDAUGHTER OF THEIR LATE MESSIAH, MAGNETO.

BUT IF THE AVENGERS FIND THEMSELVES DRAGGED INTO THE MUTANT WARS, WE HOPE CRYSTAL WILL FIND US AS WORTHY ALLIES AS SHE HAS BEEN TO US.

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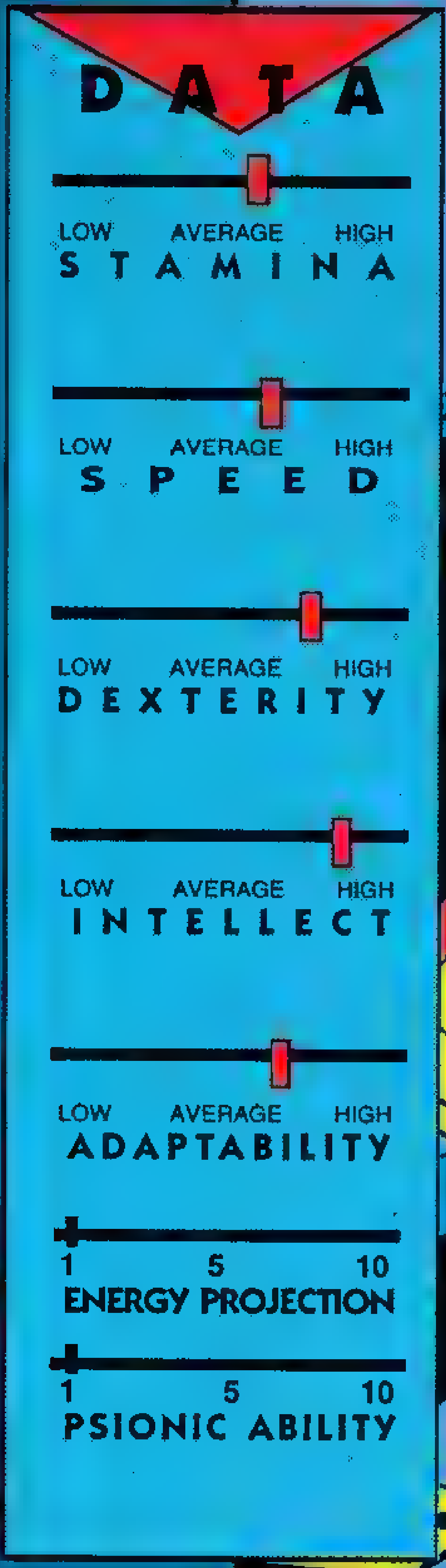
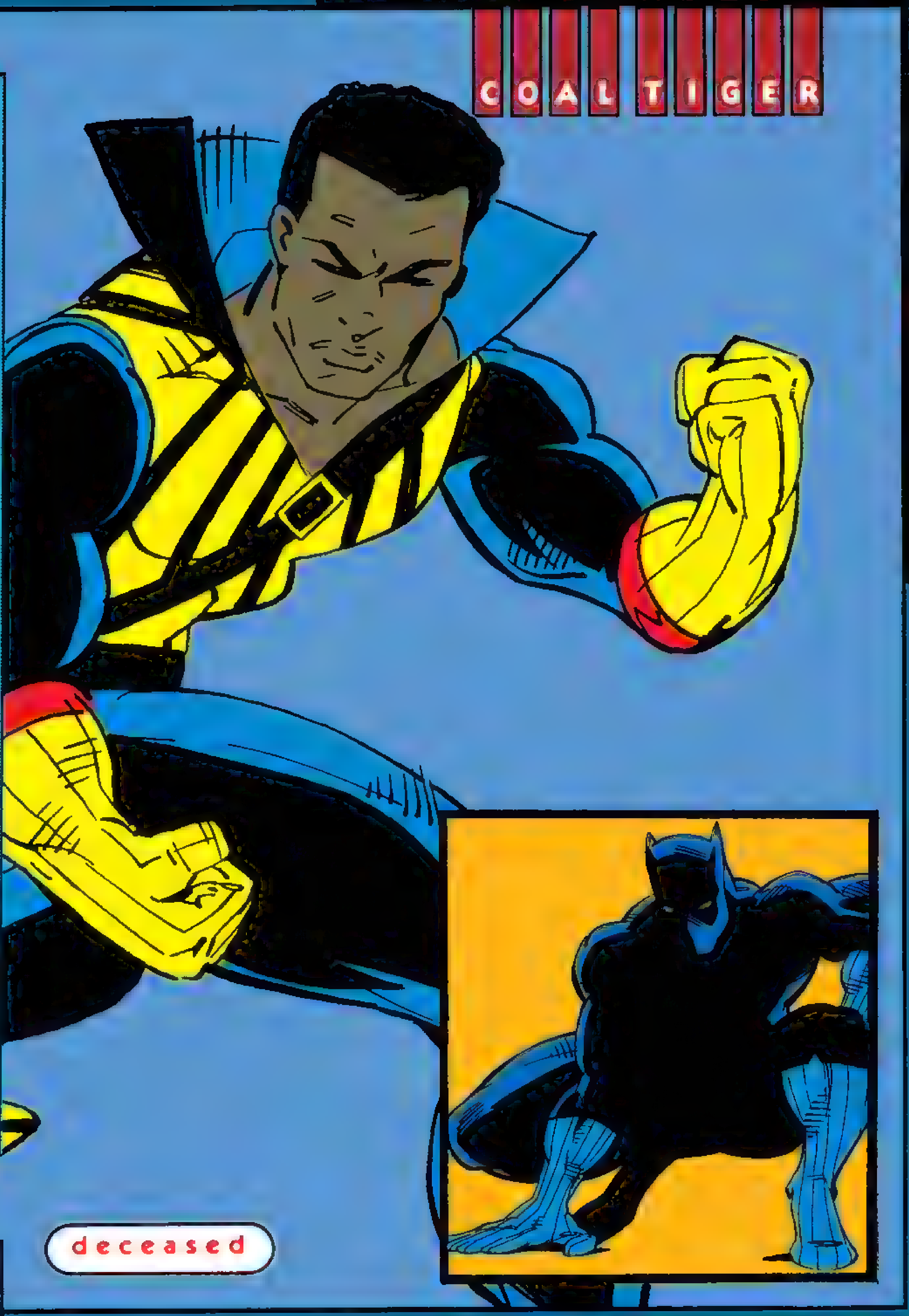
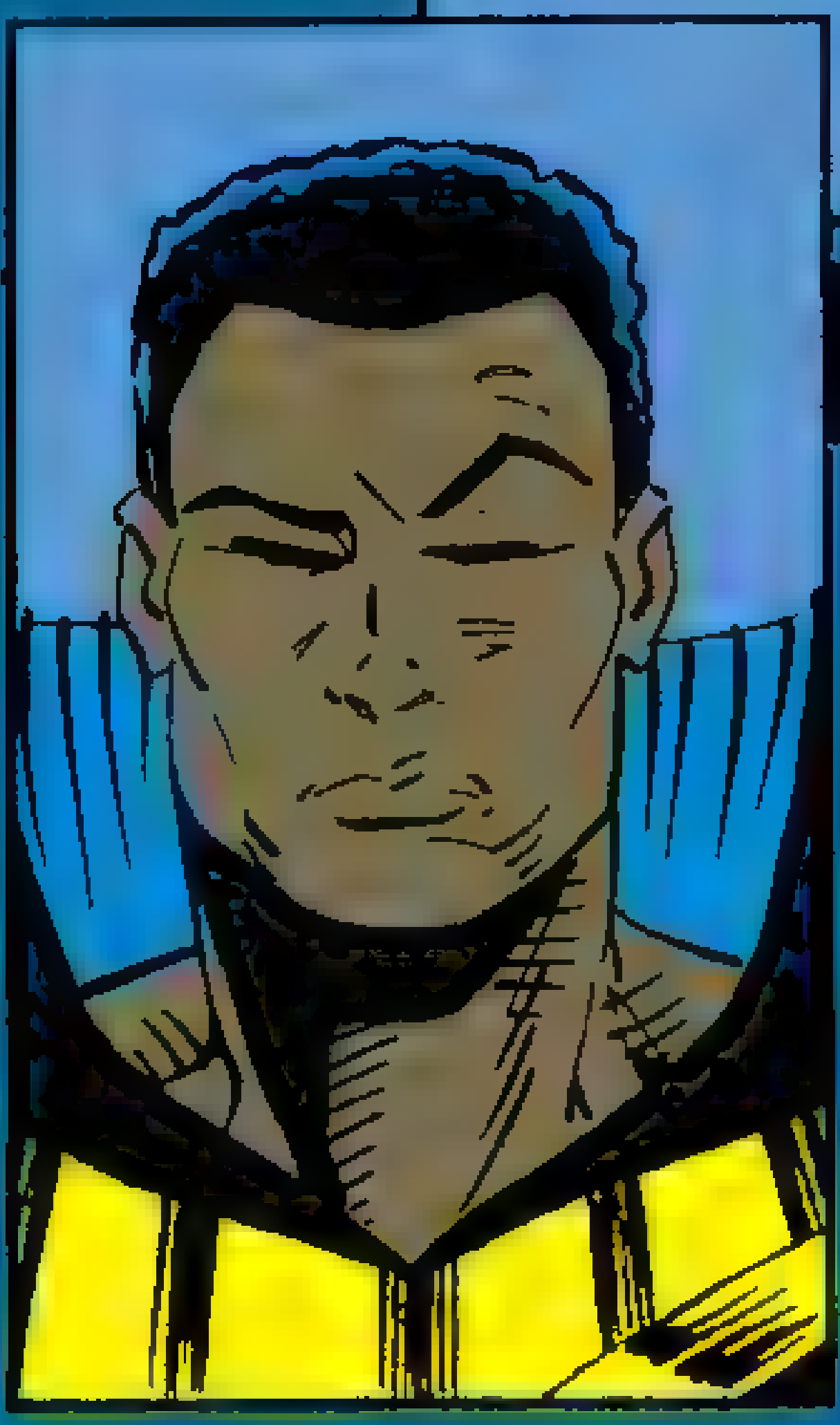
AVENGERS FILE







COAL TIGER

A hostage of the Gatherers from yet another timeline, this man was a duplicate of T'Challa, the Black Panther.

It was our introduction to this brave individual that clinched the theory that we were dealing with alternate realities with the Gatherers.

Apparently, the Gatherers must eliminate their doppelgangers on this world before they can truly become functional here. Again the Knight theorizes this elimination allows the Gatherer to come into final sync with our world. Such an elimination was attempted on the Black Panther. The attempt was thwarted by the Avengers, but tragically this resulted in the death of the Tiger.

But his nobility...and the Swordsman's...clearly indicate that the Gatherers are not, when separated from their fellows, necessarily hostile to the Avengers. Some type of misinformation, or mind control is clearly suggested, administered perhaps by this mysterious Proctor.

We simply do not know. But it is clear we must learn much more before we confront these Gatherers again.

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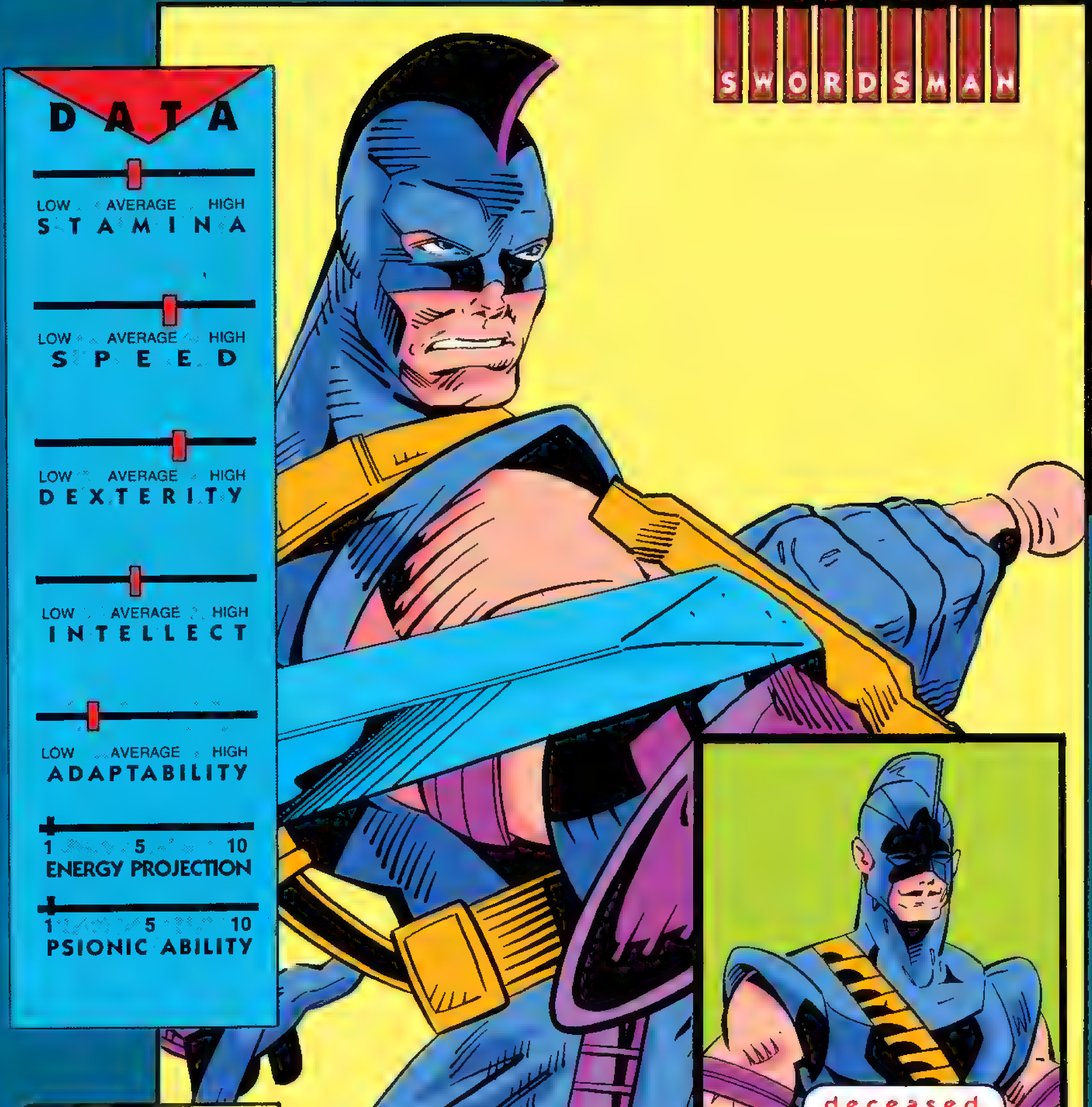
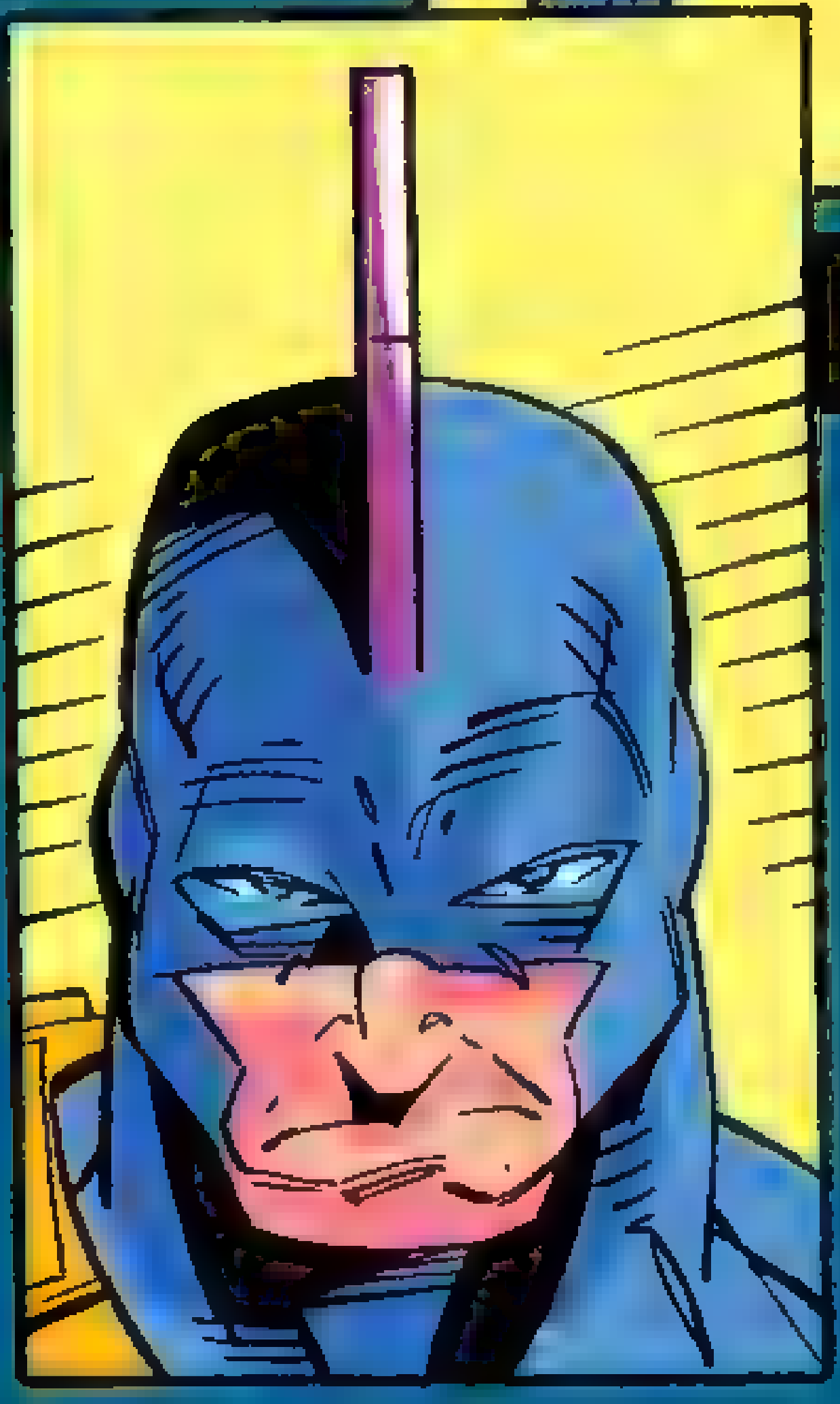
AVENGERS FILE


SWORDSMAN
DATA
LOW AVERAGE HIGH
STAMINA
LOW AVERAGE HIGH
SPEED
LOW AVERAGE HIGH
DEXTERITY
LOW AVERAGE HIGH
INTELLECT
LOW AVERAGE HIGH
ADAPTABILITY
1 5 10
ENERGY PROJECTION
1 5 10
PSIONIC ABILITY
deceased



SWORDSMAN

The Gatherers, a new and mysterious group who seem determined to destroy the Avengers. Their motives are unclear, but it is safe to say we believe they are travelers from other timelines/parallel earths.

Our first contact with the Gatherers was the Swordsman, who despite a few differences in appearance and costume was a virtual doppelganger to our own member who died several years ago. Since becoming our captive a few weeks ago, we have learned this new Swordsman is more confused than belligerent. He himself has only become aware of his origins through the Vision's deductions.

Severe headaches, which the Black Knight theorizes arise from the possibility that the Swordsman is not yet in sync with our timeline, seem to lead to a type of amnesia which has prevented us from learning anything concrete about the Gatherers, or about a mysterious Proctor that has been mentioned by several members.

As for what will happen to this new Swordsman, a man truly without a home, it remains to be seen.

ENCODE NEXT EDIT DELETE PREVIOUS

AVENGERS FILE

DATA

LOW AVERAGE HIGH
STAMINA

LOW AVERAGE HIGH
SPEED

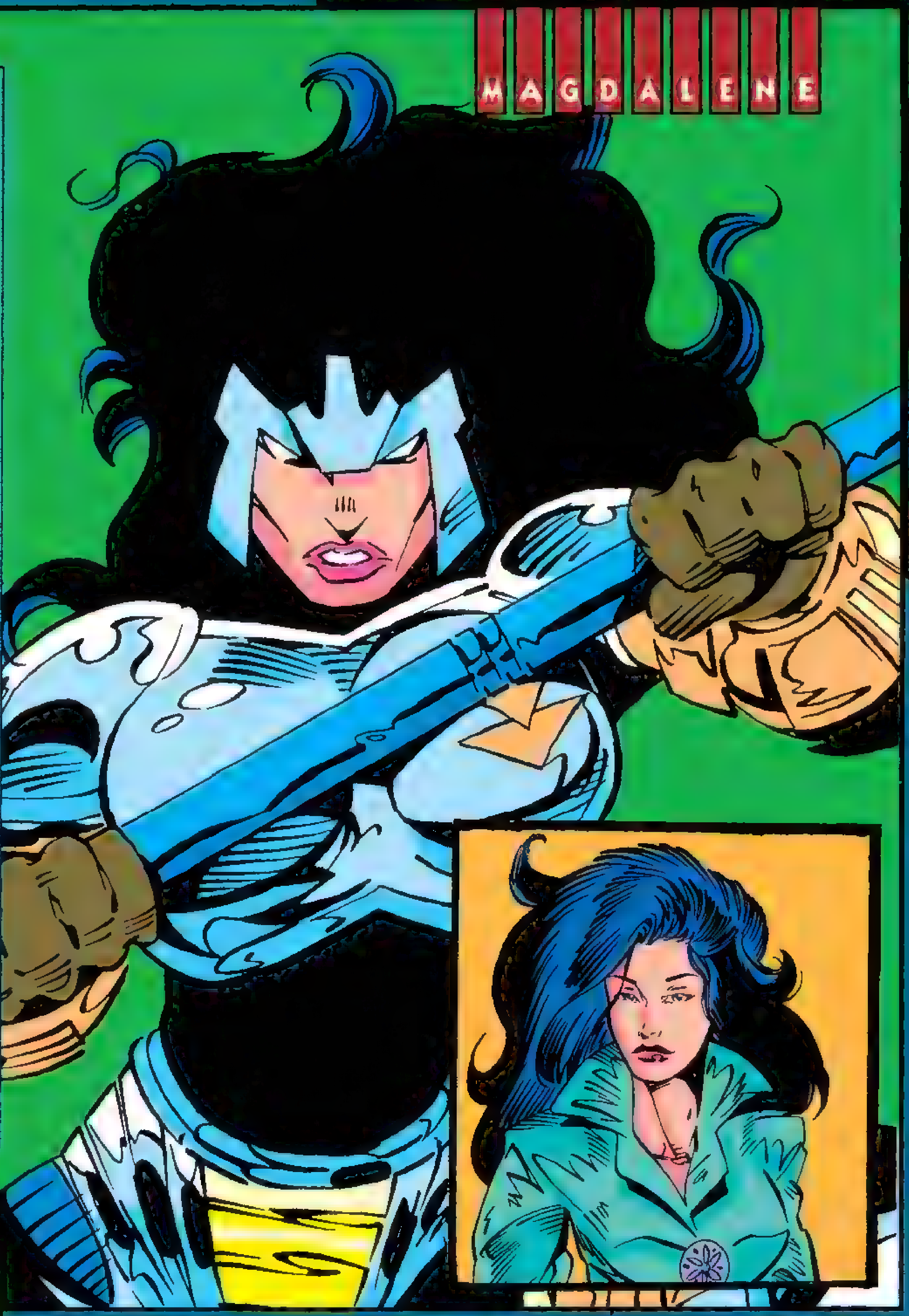
LOW AVERAGE HIGH
DEXTERITY

LOW AVERAGE HIGH
INTELLECT

LOW AVERAGE HIGH
ADAPTABILITY

1 5 10
ENERGY PROJECTION

1 5 10
PSIONIC ABILITY



MAGDALENE

Magdalene, along with the Swordsman, was the first of the Gatherers we met. She is a woman of formidable strength, sufficient to take on Hercules, but her main asset is a power lance of unknown technology that not only shoots a beam of as-yet unidentified power, but also serves as an instrument of teleportation.

I surmise in some way that Magdalene is not inherently malevolent. As a matter of fact, her initial attacks on us seemed to stem from her mistaken belief that we were the same Avengers who had betrayed the Swordsman (a man she clearly loves) in his timeline, a notion that also accounted for the Swordsman's initial hostility to us. That both were so adamant in their beliefs suggests, at least to me, that someone convinced them of this fact. Again, I wonder how the mysterious Proctor fits in.

It was the accidental encounter between Hercules, the Black Knight and fashion model Marissa Darrow that first suggested that the Gatherers were more than they seemed, for Ms. Darrow was a twin of Magdalene's. Despite claims of no knowledge about the Gatherers, Marissa's subsequent mysterious disappearance cast some doubt as to her veracity. However, the kidnapping of the Panther and the death of the Coal Tiger clearly indicate a pattern called "Gathering" and we can only conclude that her disappearance was not voluntary and that she was a victim of this cruel practice.

Clearly, Gatherers have counterparts in all walks of life on this earth, and I only fear that if more of their number do appear, their innocent doppelganger will meet the same tragic fate. Hopefully, we will find the answer to this puzzle before then.

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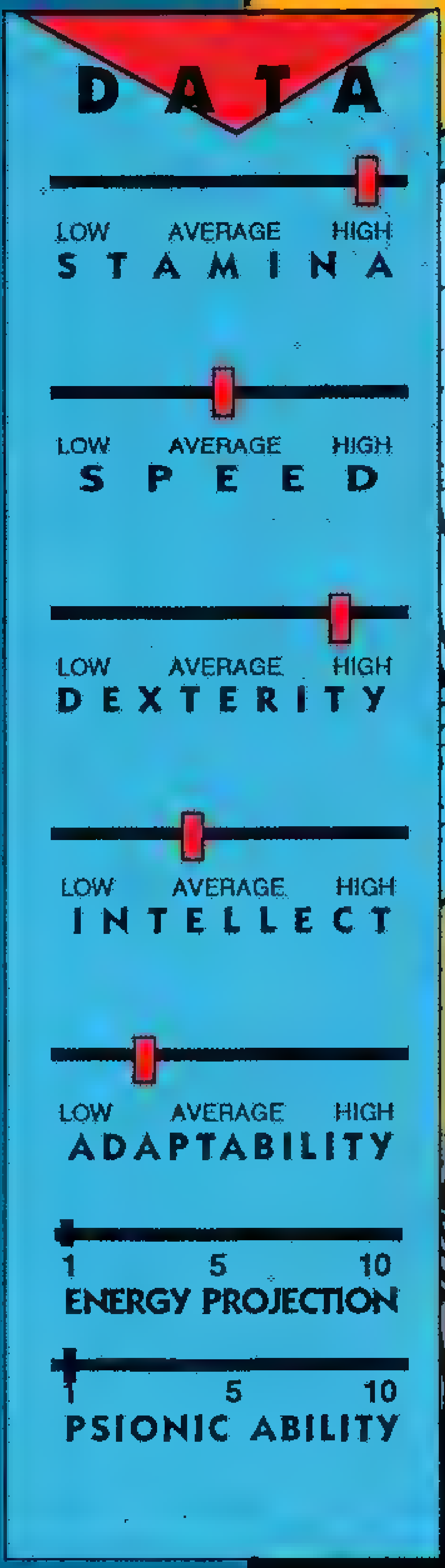
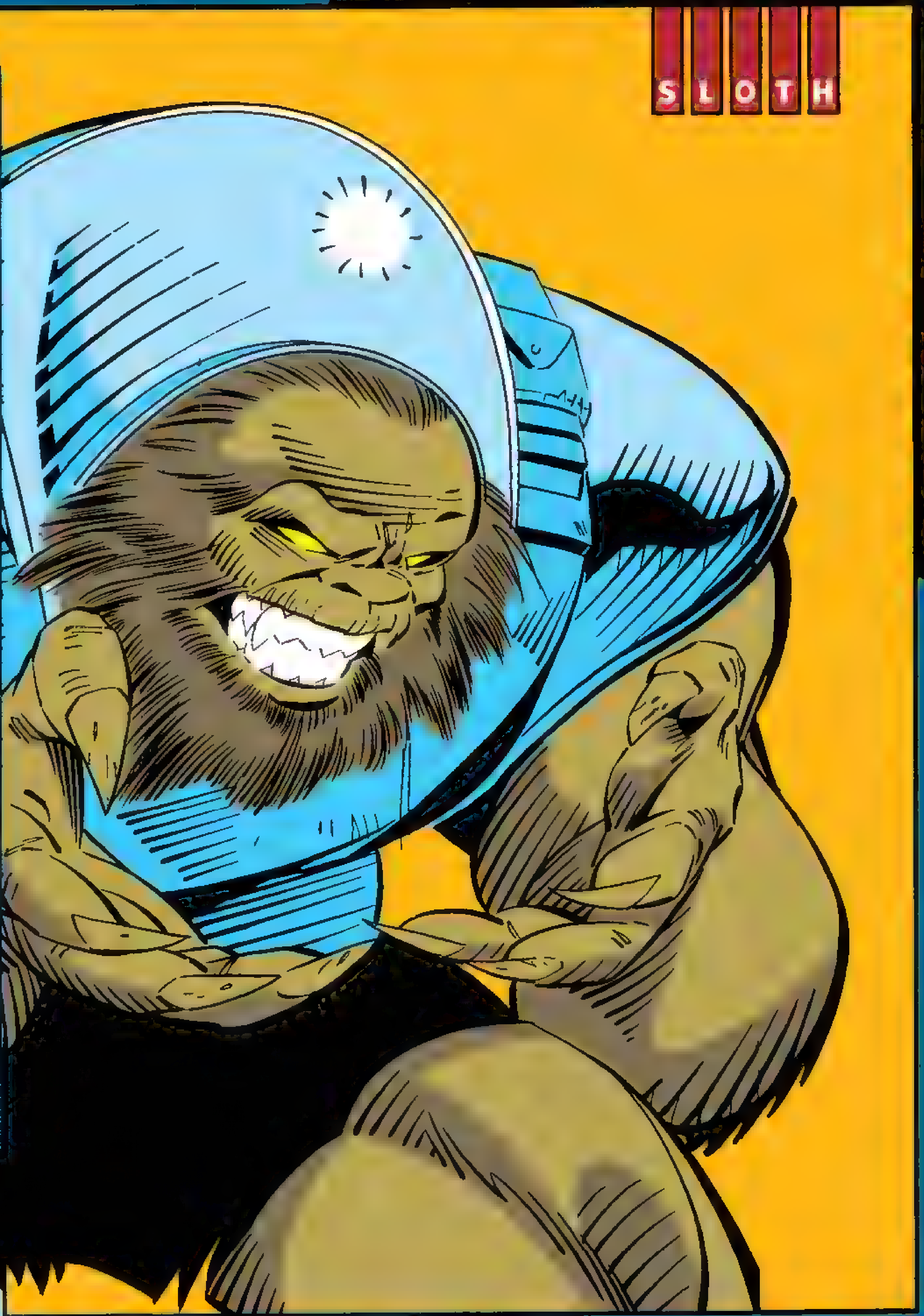
AVENGERS FILE





SLOTH

Unlike the Tiger and Swordsman, we can find no template in this dimension for this bestial Gatherer. Perhaps there is none.

Sloth, despite his name, is a ferocious and dangerous adversary. His hulking strength and raking claws are capable of inflicting pain on even Hercules himself.

We've only had minimal contact with Sloth, but he seems to be an underling in their hierarchy, as was indeed the Swordsman. Clearly it was Magdalene who was calling the shots when we first encountered the Gatherers, and it is also equally clear that Sloth seemed to take orders from the final, most dangerous of Gatherers...

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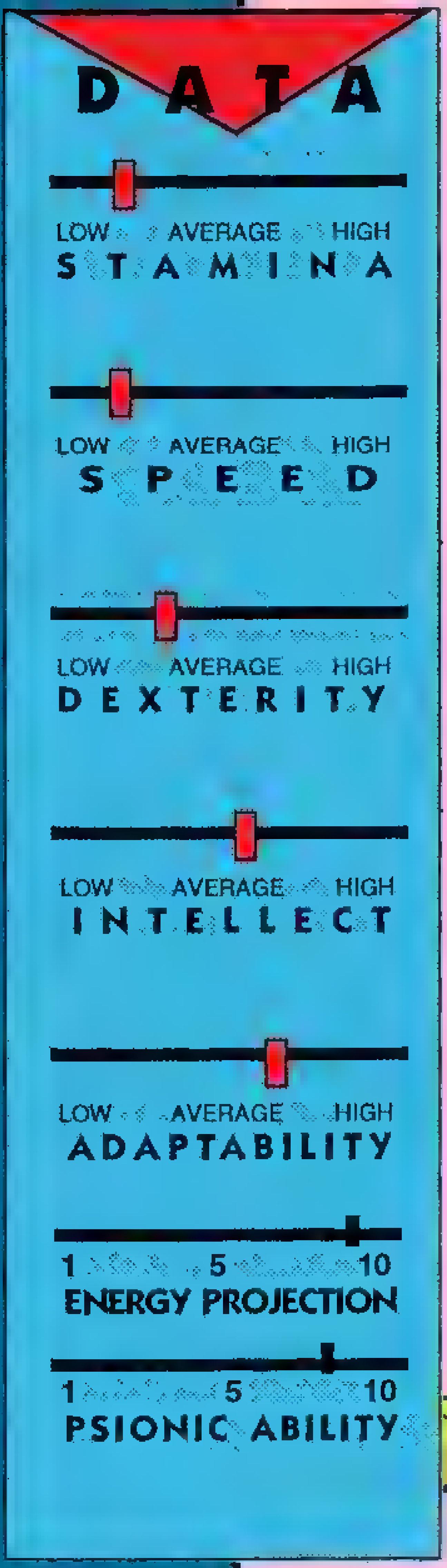
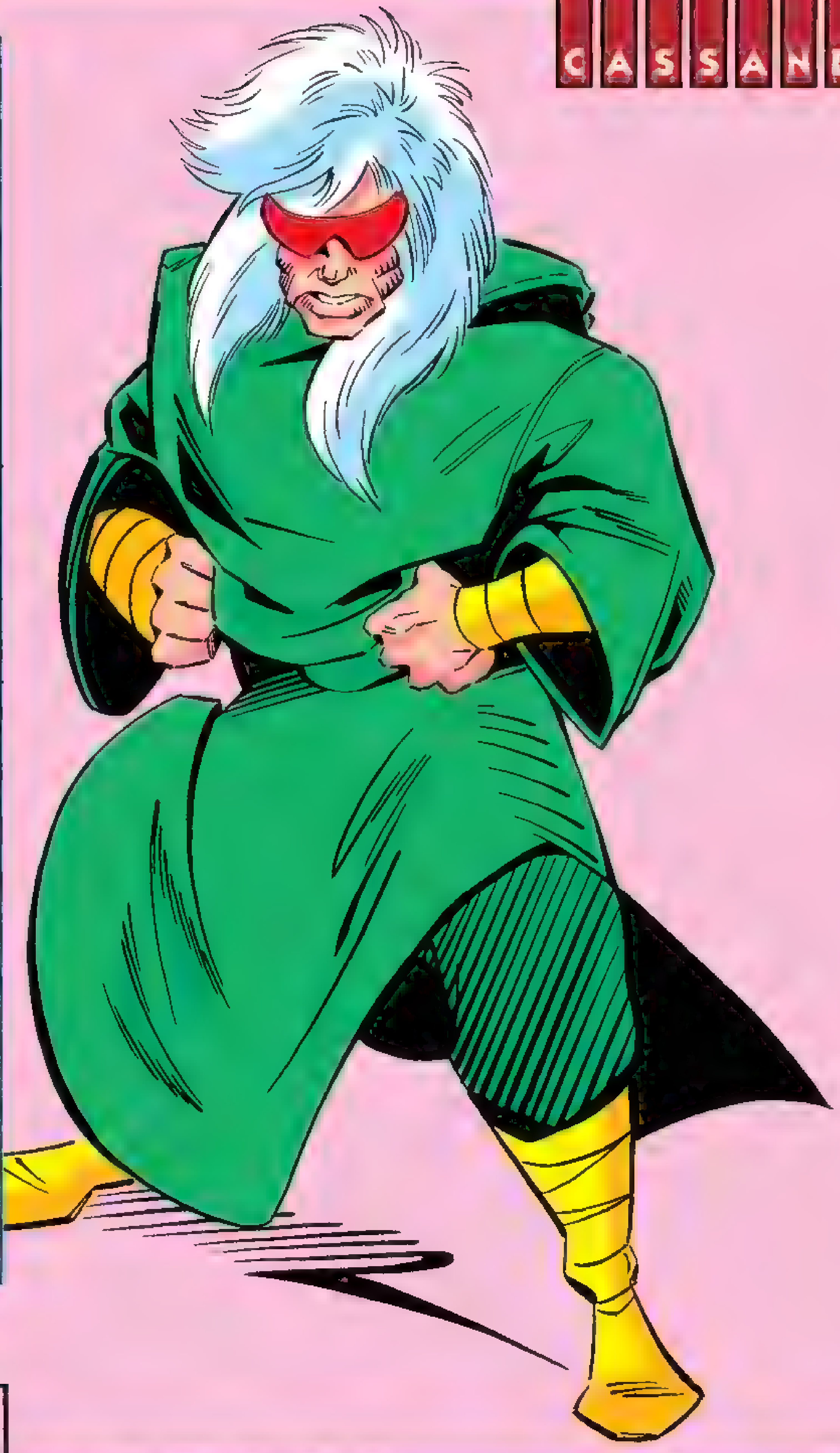
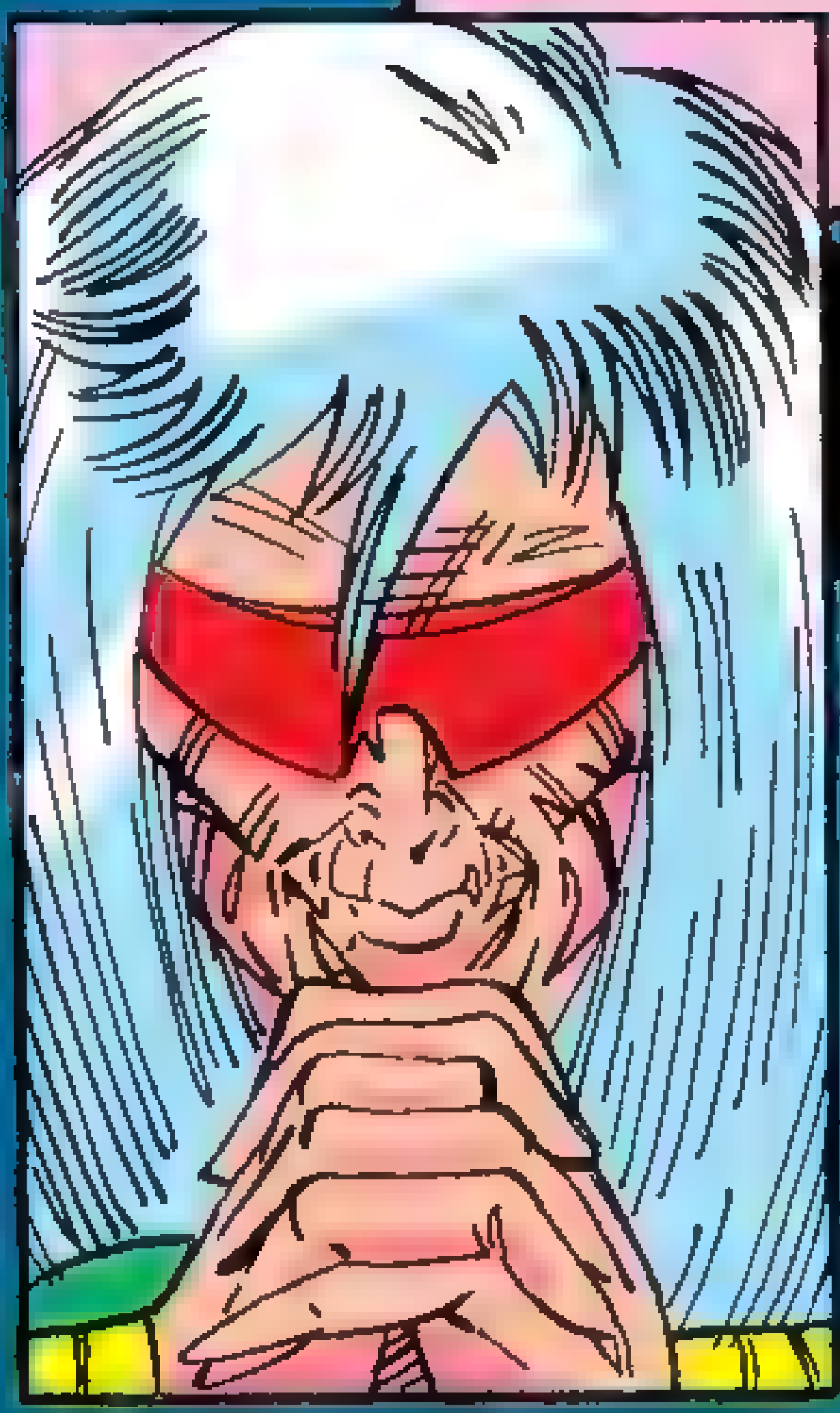
AVENGERS FILE

CASSANDRA







CASSANDRA

Cassandra, also apparently called Mother Cassandra.

Apparently a low level telepath who is able to befuddle and confuse adversaries by placing in their minds the belief that she is merely a helpless old woman. Cassandra's true power is hidden behind her eyepiece.

Once removed, she can unleash a powerbolt that is capable of causing not only extensive physical damage but affects the nervous system of anyone it touches as well.

After suffering its effects, all human Avengers suffered from exhaustion, lack of muscle control as well as clouded thinking. Some sort of synaptic and neural interference is evident and the effect does not wear off for twelve hours. It should be noted even Hercules and Sersi suffered a lessening of function after the attack, albeit on a far less scale than the others.

As with Sloth, we find no coordinate for this Gatherer in our files, but I believe she is the most dangerous and unstable of their number.

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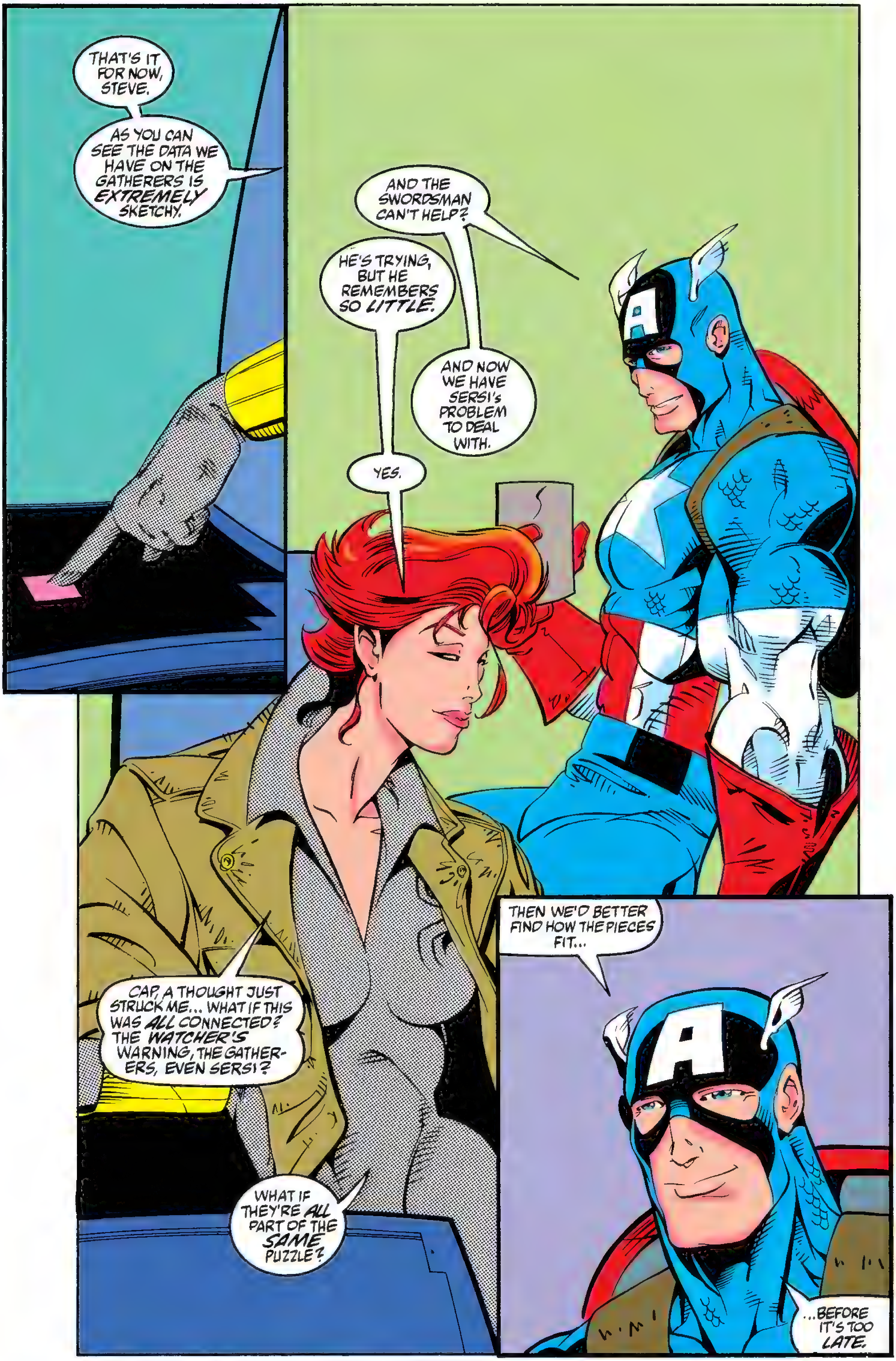
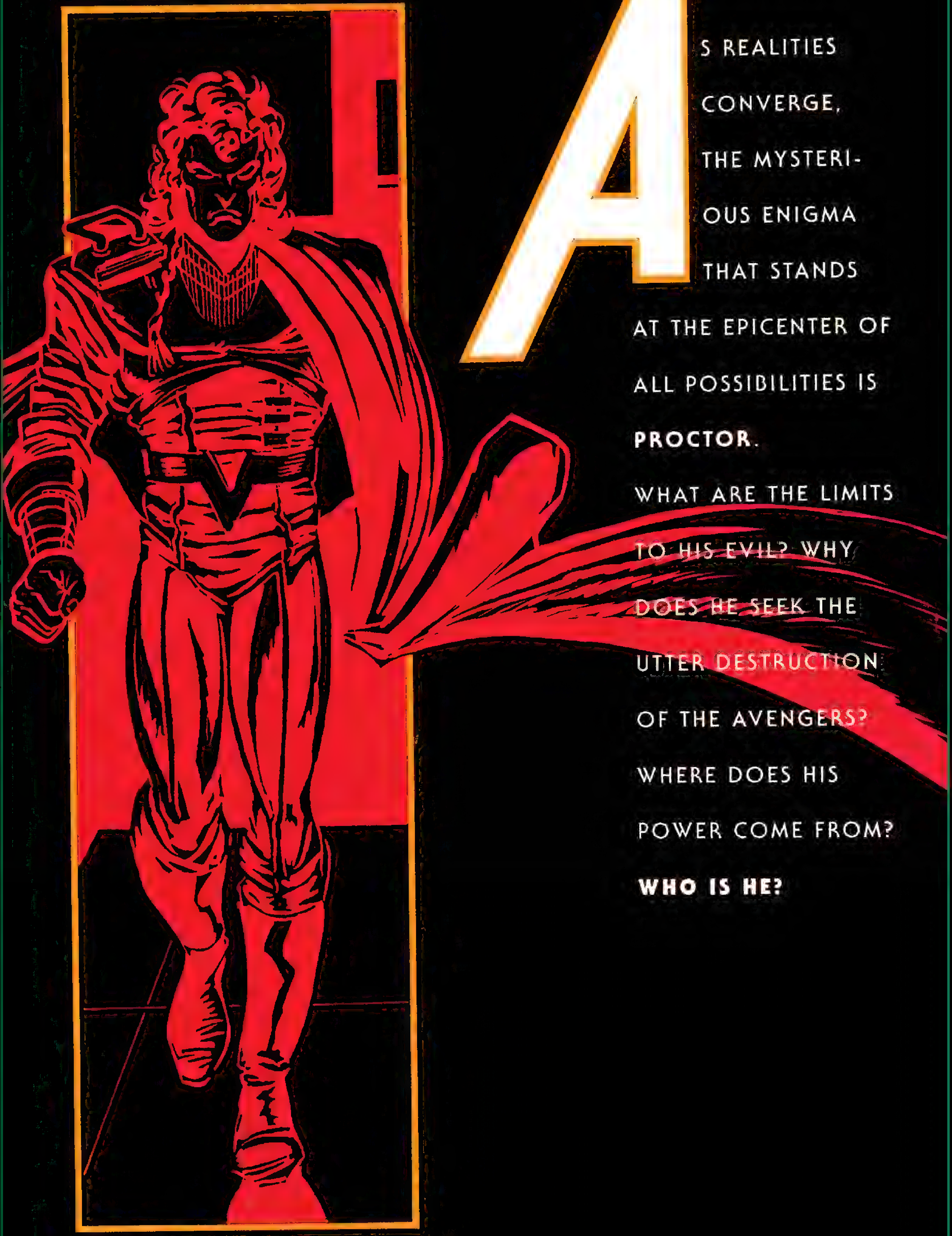

THAT'S IT FOR NOW, STEVE.
AS YOU CAN SEE THE DATA WE HAVE ON THE GATHERERS IS *EXTREMELY* SKETCHY.
AND THE SWORDSMAN CAN'T HELP?
HE'S TRYING, BUT HE REMEMBERS SO *LITTLE*.
AND NOW WE HAVE SERSI's PROBLEM TO DEAL WITH.
YES.
CAP, A THOUGHT JUST STRUCK ME... WHAT IF THIS WAS *ALL* CONNECTED? THE *WATCHER'S* WARNING, THE GATHERERS, EVEN SERSI?
WHAT IF THEY'RE *ALL* PART OF THE *SAME* PUZZLE?
THEN WE'D BETTER FIND HOW THE PIECES FIT...
...BEFORE IT'S TOO *LATE*.



AS REALITIES CONVERGE, THE MYSTERIOUS ENIGMA THAT STANDS AT THE EPICENTER OF ALL POSSIBILITIES IS **PROCTOR**. WHAT ARE THE LIMITS TO HIS EVIL? WHY DOES HE SEEK THE UTTER DESTRUCTION OF THE AVENGERS? WHERE DOES HIS POWER COME FROM? **WHO IS HE?**

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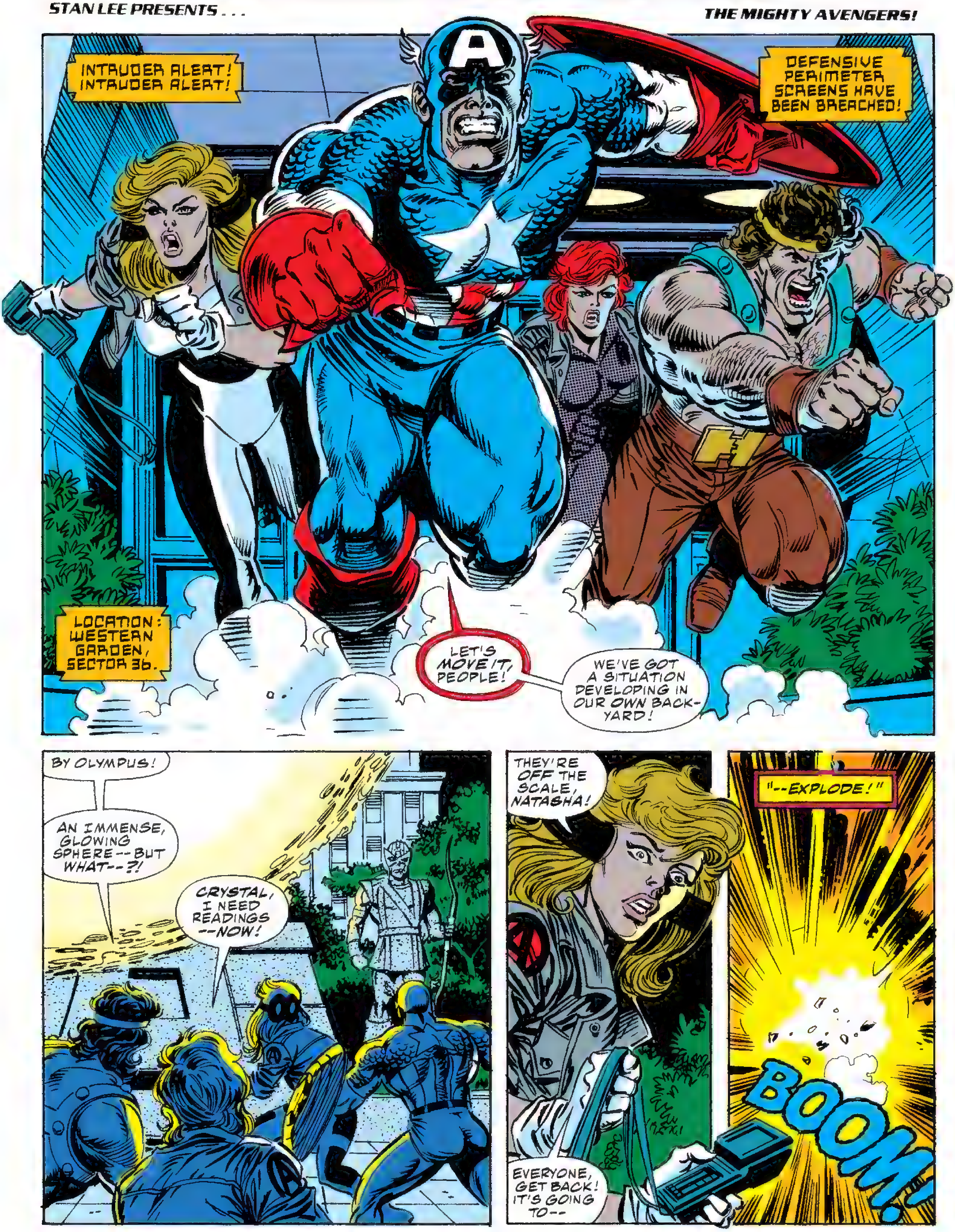
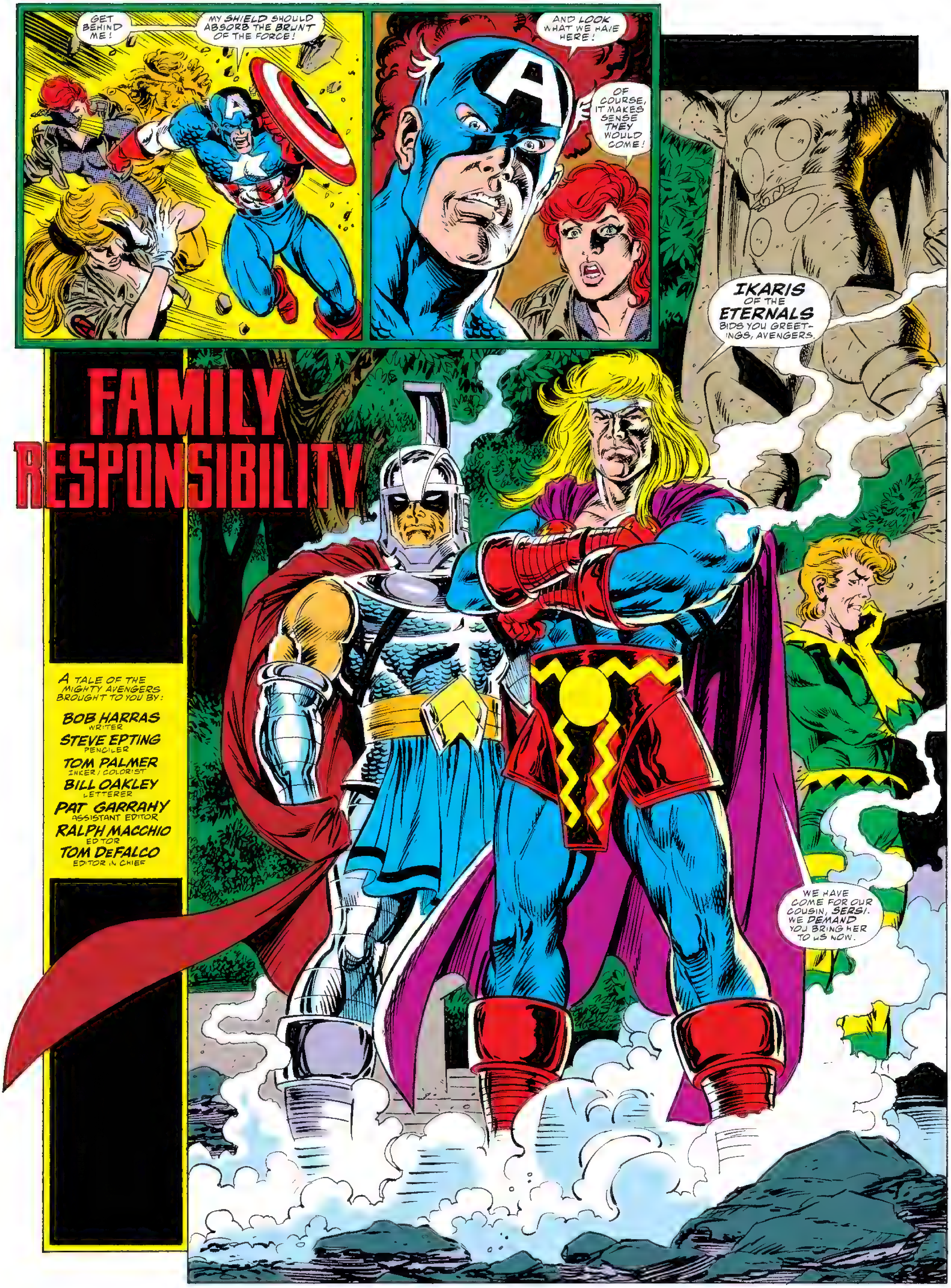
CONTINUING THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF THE
AVENGERS
PROPHESIES OF DOOM!
EPTING
PALMER

TO COMBAT THOSE THREATS WHICH NO SINGLE HERO CAN STAND AGAINST, EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES HAVE FORGED A COVENANT TO UNITE IN BATTLE FOR THE PROTECTION OF ALL MANKIND!
STAN LEE PRESENTS . . .
THE MIGHTY AVENGERS!


INTRUDER ALERT! INTRUDER ALERT!
DEFENSIVE PERIMETER SCREENS HAVE BEEN BREACHED!
LOCATION: WESTERN GARDEN, SECTOR 36.
LET'S MOVE IT, PEOPLE!
WE'VE GOT A SITUATION DEVELOPING IN OUR OWN BACK-YARD!
BY OLYMPUS!
AN IMMENSE, GLOWING SPHERE--BUT WHAT--?!
CRYSTAL, I NEED READINGS --NOW!
THEY'RE OFF THE SCALE, NATASHA!
EVERYONE, GET BACK! IT'S GOING TO--
"--EXPLODE!"
BOOM!!



FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY

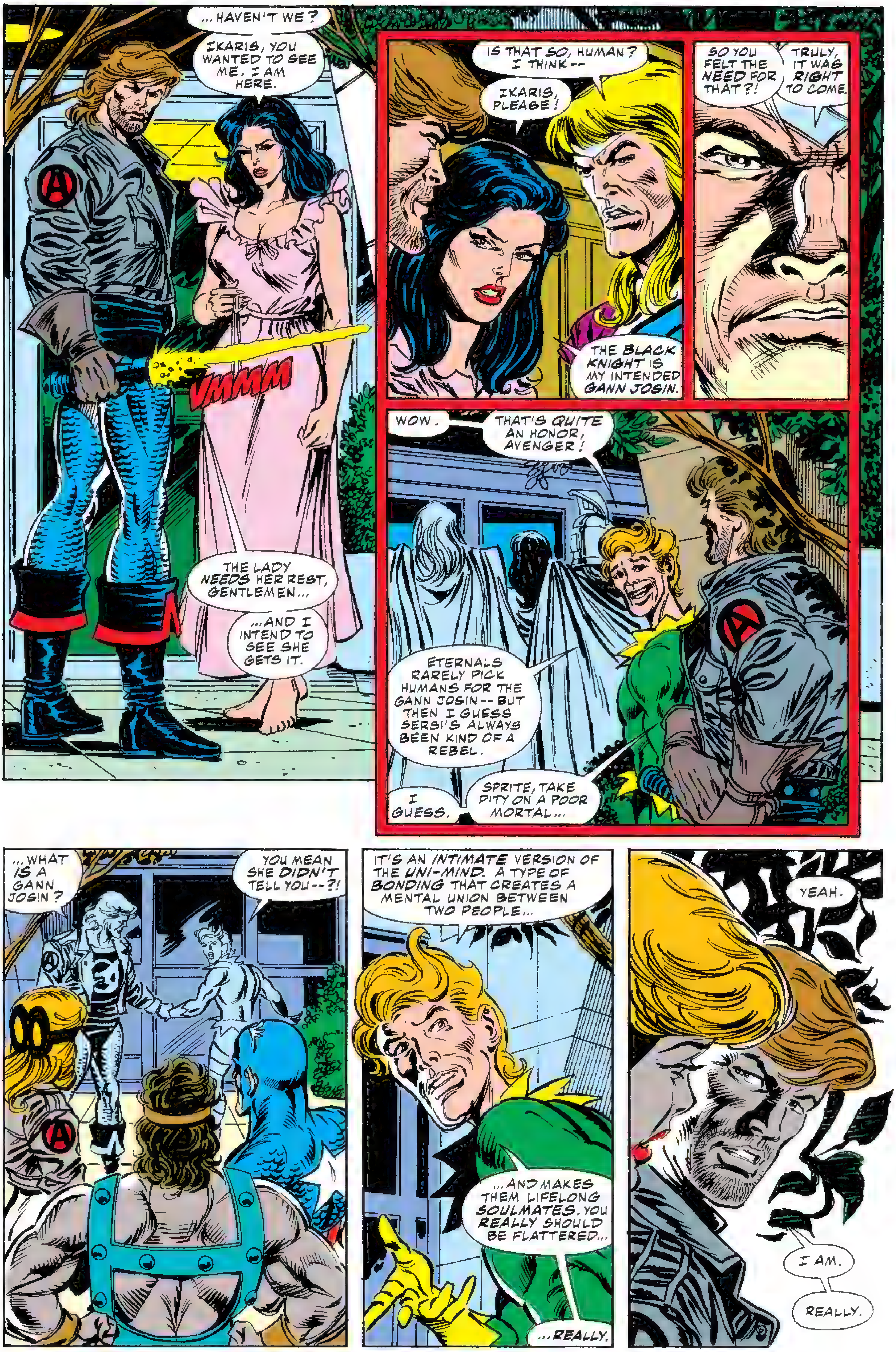
A TALE OF THE MIGHTY AVENGERS BROUGHT TO YOU BY:

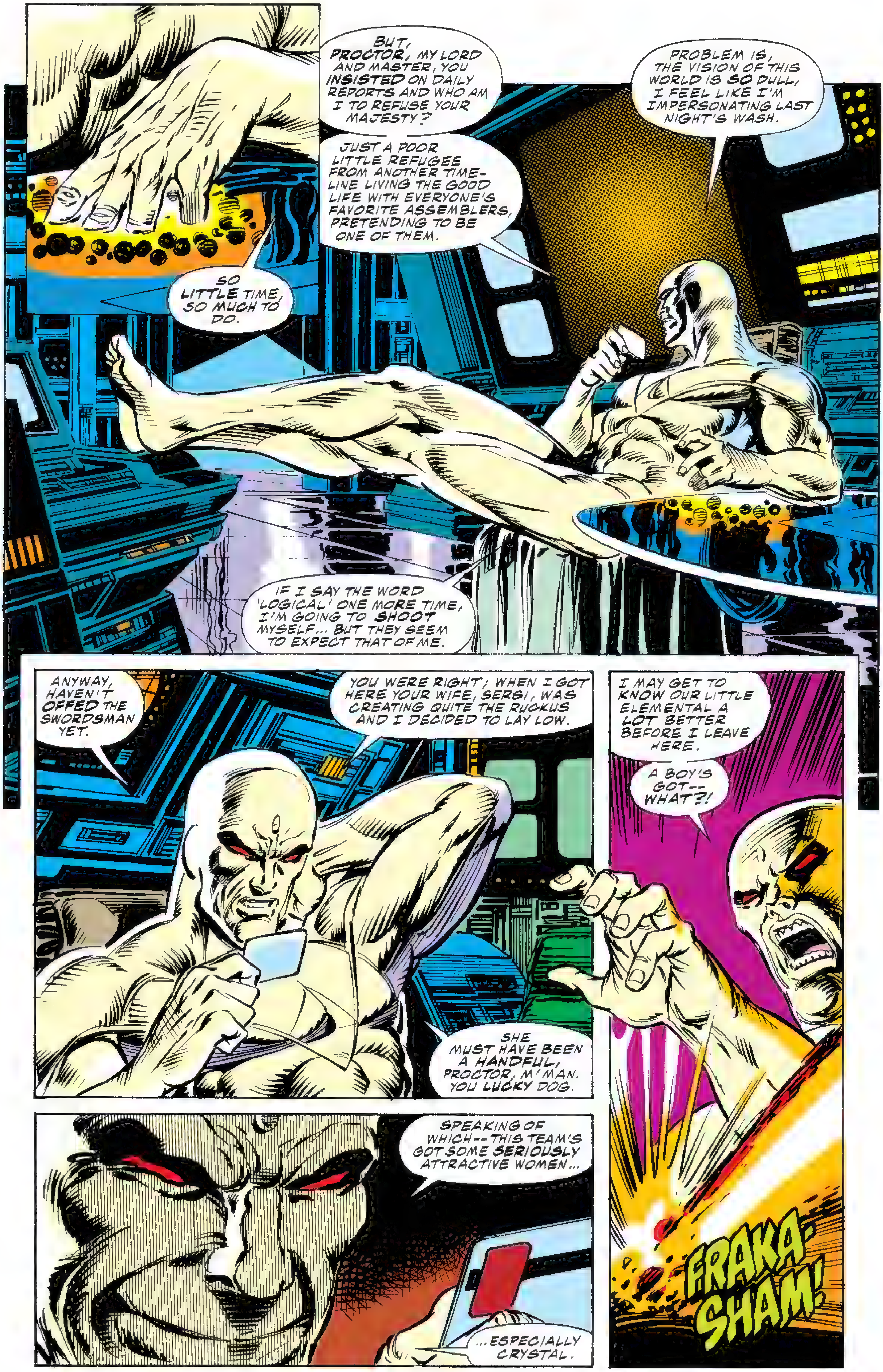
BOB HARRAS WRITER
STEVE EPTING PENCILER
TOM PALMER INKER / COLORIST
BILL OAKLEY LETTERER
PAT GARRAHY ASSISTANT EDITOR
RALPH MACCHIO EDITOR
TOM DeFALCO EDITOR IN CHIEF

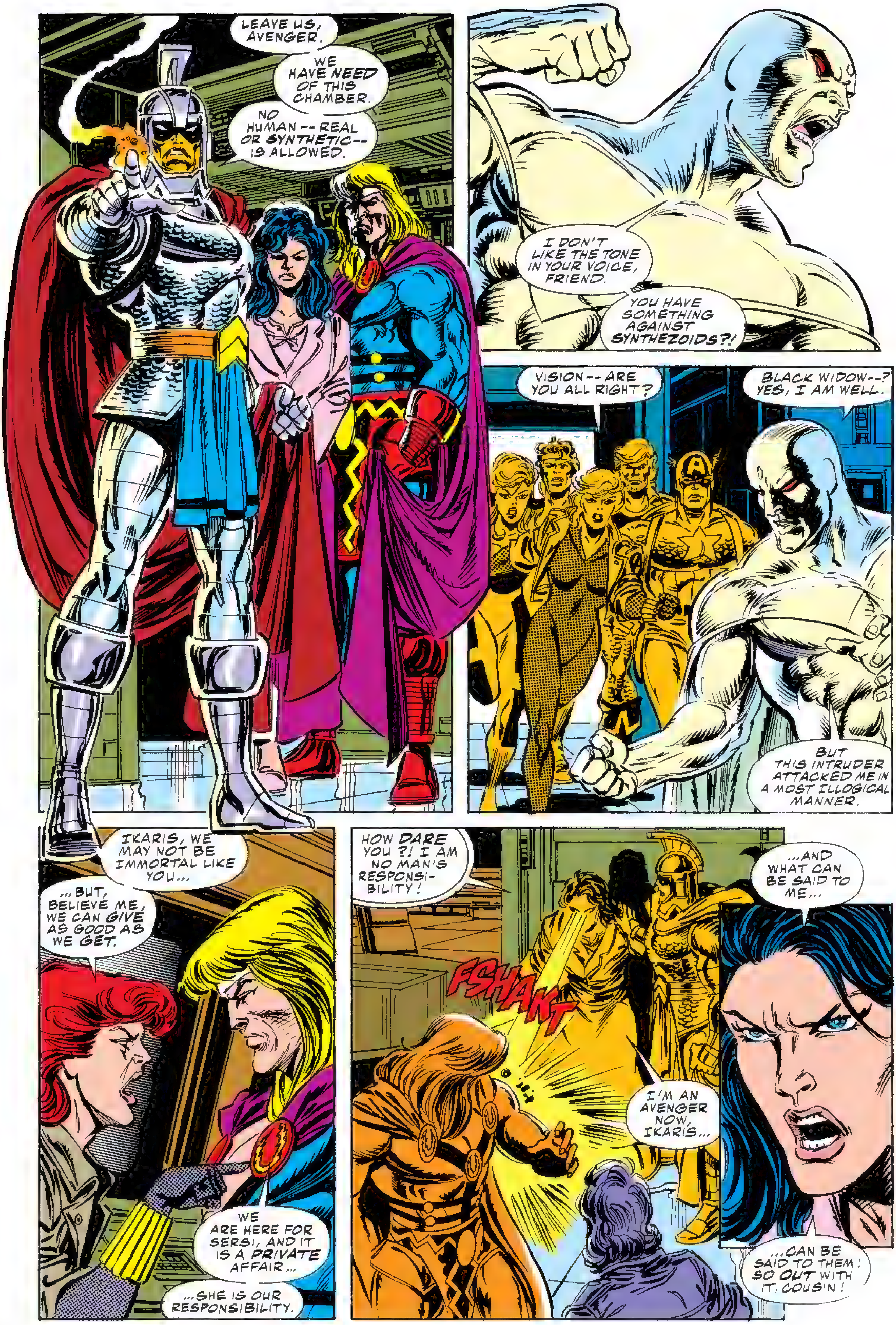
GET BEHIND ME!
MY *SHIELD* SHOULD ABSORB THE *BRUNT* OF THE FORCE!
AND *LOOK* WHAT WE HAVE HERE!
OF COURSE, IT MAKES SENSE *THEY* WOULD COME!
IKARIS OF THE **ETERNALS** BIDS YOU GREETINGS, AVENGERS.
WE HAVE COME FOR OUR COUSIN, *SERSI*. WE *DEMAND* YOU BRING HER TO US NOW.

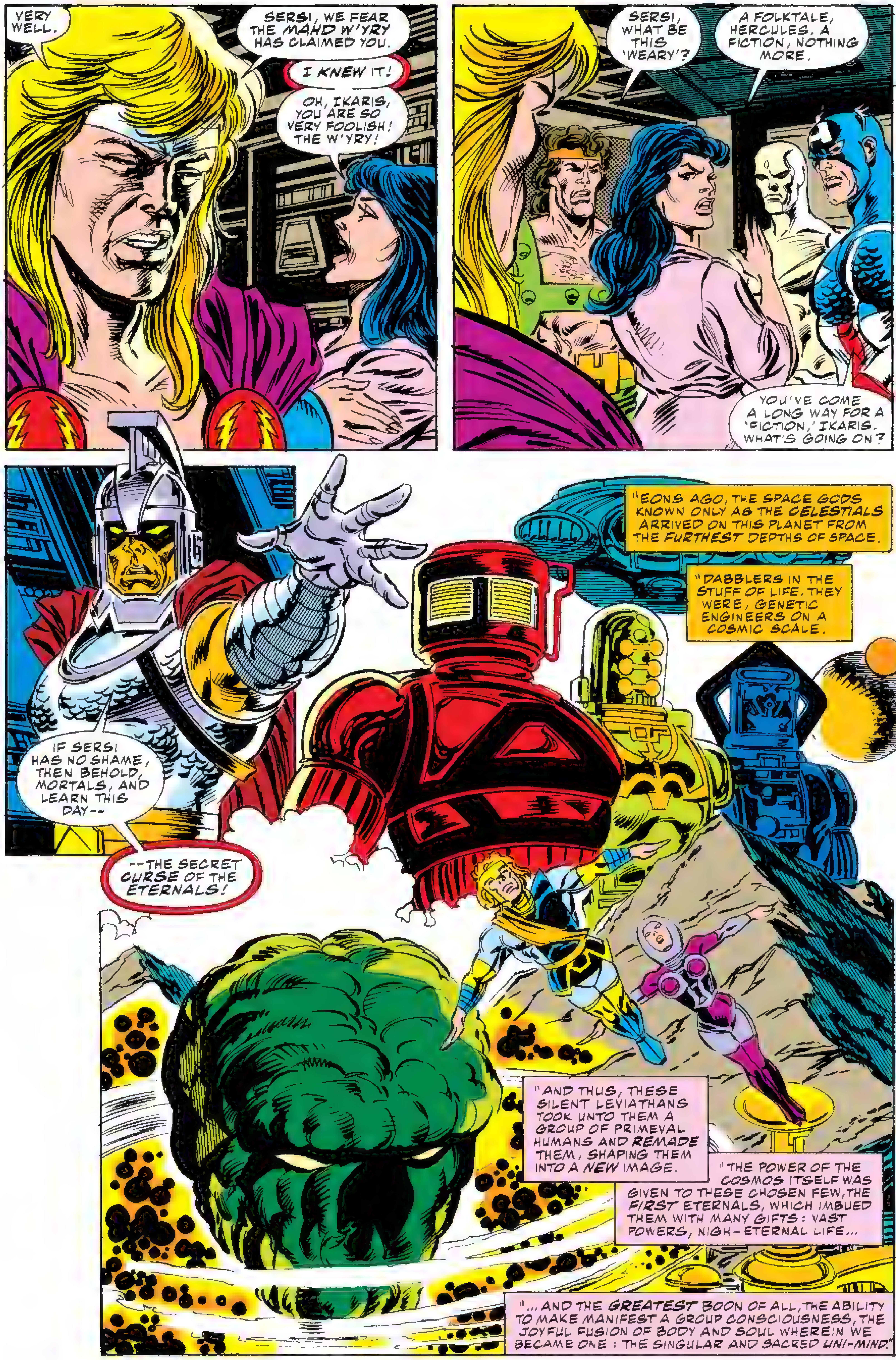
WE ARE WAITING.
AND YOU'LL WAIT A WHILE LONGER, IKARIS.
YOUR COUSIN'S HAD SOME SORT OF BREAKDOWN -- BUT SOMEHOW I THINK YOU ALREADY KNOW THAT.
IN ANY EVENT, SHE'S IN NO CONDITION TO BE MOVED...
...WHETHER YOU "DEMAND" IT OR NOT.
THIS MATTER IS NOT OPEN TO DEBATE, CAPTAIN AMERICA.
WE ARE HERE FOR SERSI, AND WE SHALL HAVE HER.
VVVTT
UHHHNN
IKARIS, YOU OVERGROWN IDIOT!
I TOLD YOU THIS WASN'T THE WAY TO DO THINGS! WE'RE NOT EVEN SURE ABOUT SERSI!
SILENCE, SPRITE.
IT DOESN'T PAY TO GET THE AVENGERS ANGRY.
NO. I THINK YOU SHOULD LISTEN TO THE BOY, CHUM.
IKARIS, THOU HAST E'ER BEEN A FRIEND...
...BUT TAKE THEE ANOTHER STEP AND HERCULES SHALL STOP THEE MOST FIRMLY.

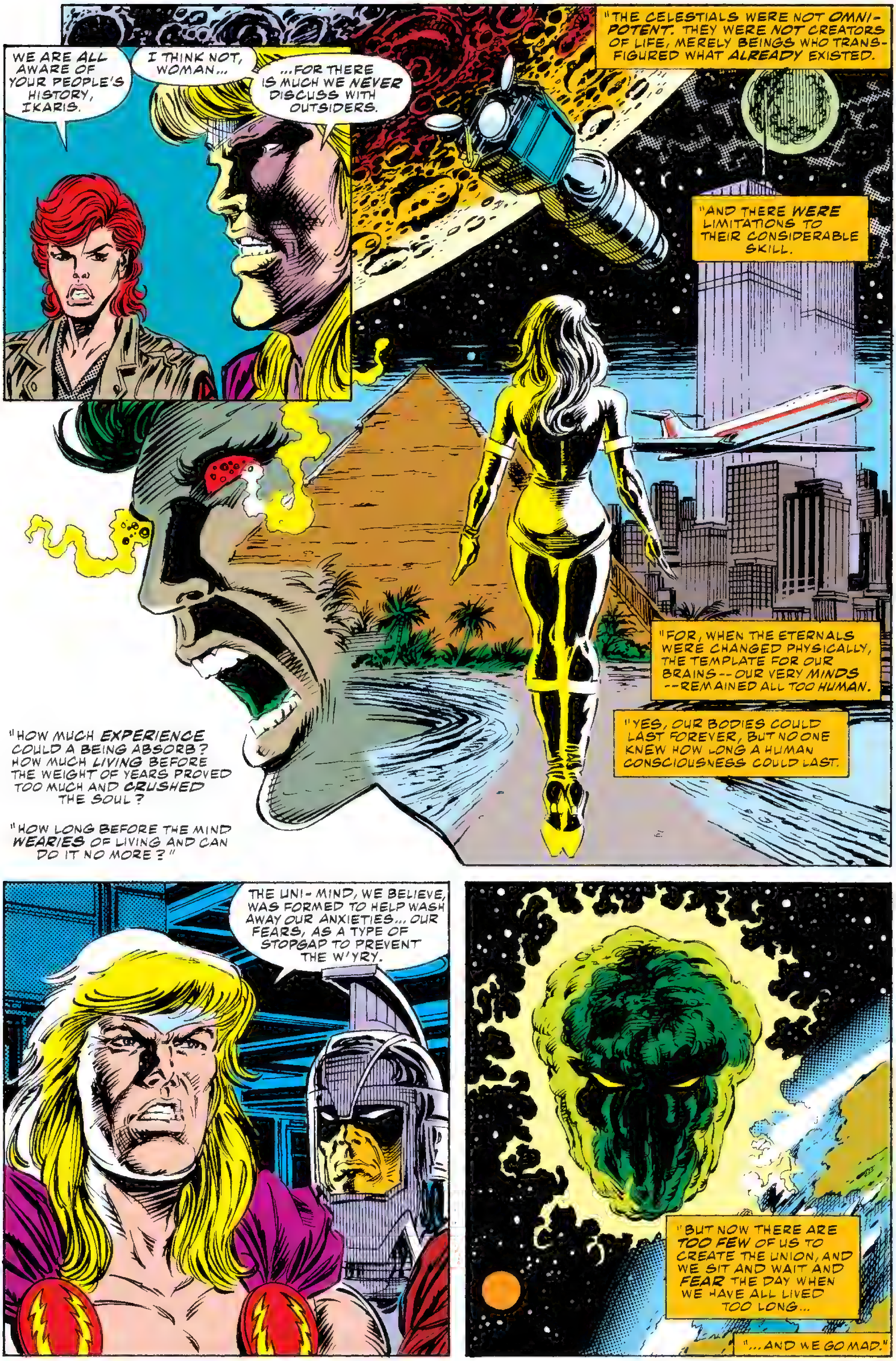
THIS IS AN ETERNAL MATTER. NONE OF YOU CAN HAVE ANY CONCEPT AS TO WHY WE'VE COME.
THEN WHY NOT TELL US, ETERNAL?
I'VE FOUND COMMUNICATION SOLVES A LOT OF PROBLEMS.
WE OWE YOU NO EXPLANATIONS, WOMAN.
WHAT--?!
RUMMMBLE
THAT'S NO WAY TO TALK TO OUR CHAIRMAN, ETERNAL.
NOW WHY DON'T YOU START TALKING OR I'LL AIM MY NEXT SEISMIC WAVE AT YOUR SKULL.
PLEASE!
LET'S ALL CALM DOWN!
WE'RE HERE TO HELP... NOT FIGHT!
THEN YOU HAVE AN ODD WAY OF SHOWING IT, COUSINS.
BUT OUR PEOPLE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN A HOT-HEADED LOT...

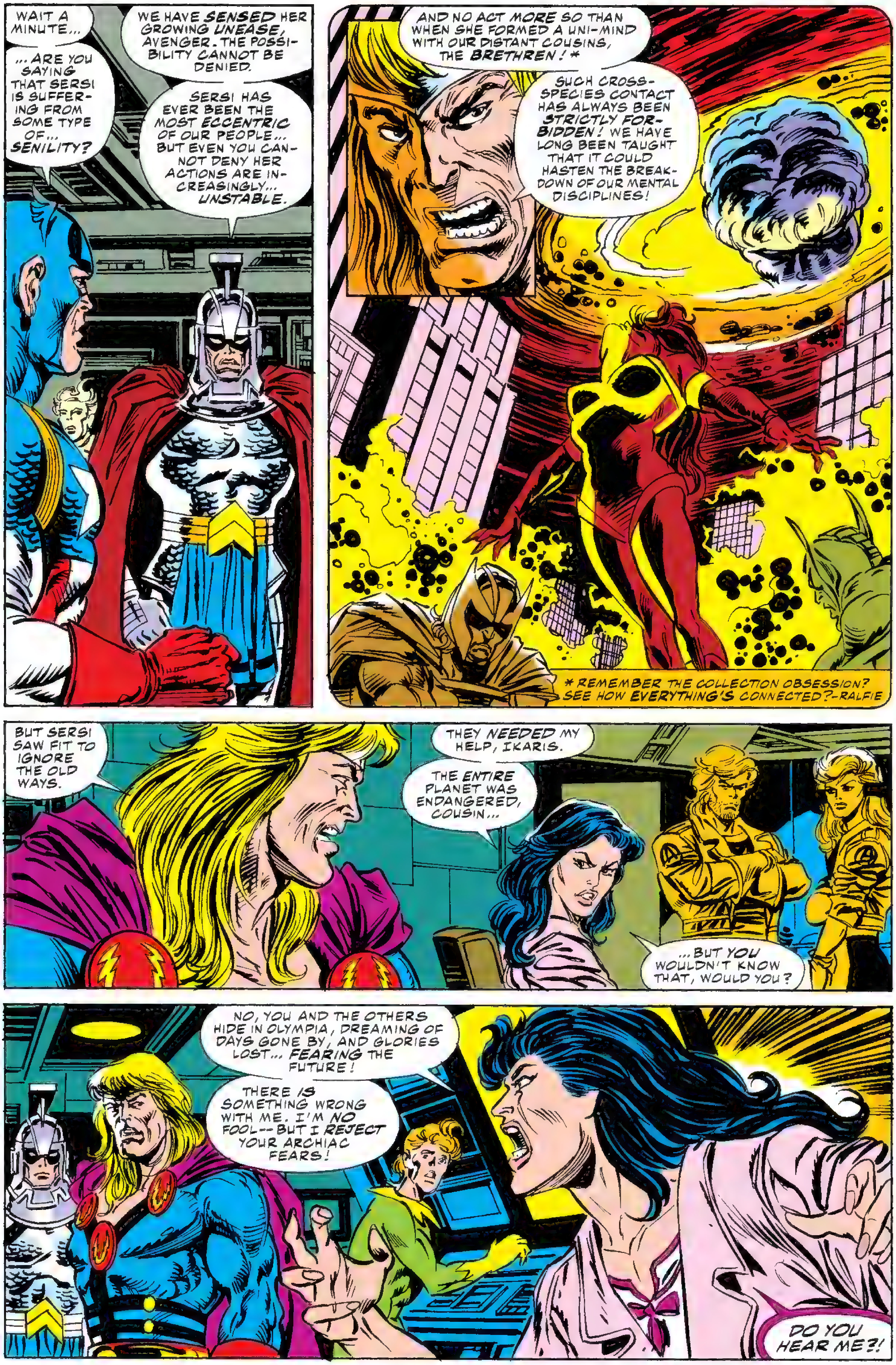

...HAVEN'T WE?
IKARIS, YOU WANTED TO SEE ME. I AM HERE.
VMMM
THE LADY NEEDS HER REST, GENTLEMEN...
...AND I INTEND TO SEE SHE GETS IT.
IS THAT SO, HUMAN? I THINK --
IKARIS, PLEASE!
THE BLACK KNIGHT IS MY INTENDED GANN JOSIN.
SO YOU FELT THE NEED FOR THAT?!
TRULY, IT WAS RIGHT TO COME.
WOW.
THAT'S QUITE AN HONOR, AVENGER!
ETERNALS RARELY PICK HUMANS FOR THE GANN JOSIN -- BUT THEN I GUESS SERSI'S ALWAYS BEEN KIND OF A REBEL.
I GUESS.
SPRITE, TAKE PITY ON A POOR MORTAL...
...WHAT IS A GANN JOSIN?
YOU MEAN SHE DIDN'T TELL YOU --?!
IT'S AN INTIMATE VERSION OF THE UNI-MIND. A TYPE OF BONDING THAT CREATES A MENTAL UNION BETWEEN TWO PEOPLE...
...AND MAKES THEM LIFELONG SOULMATES. YOU REALLY SHOULD BE FLATTERED...
...REALLY.
YEAH.
I AM.
REALLY.

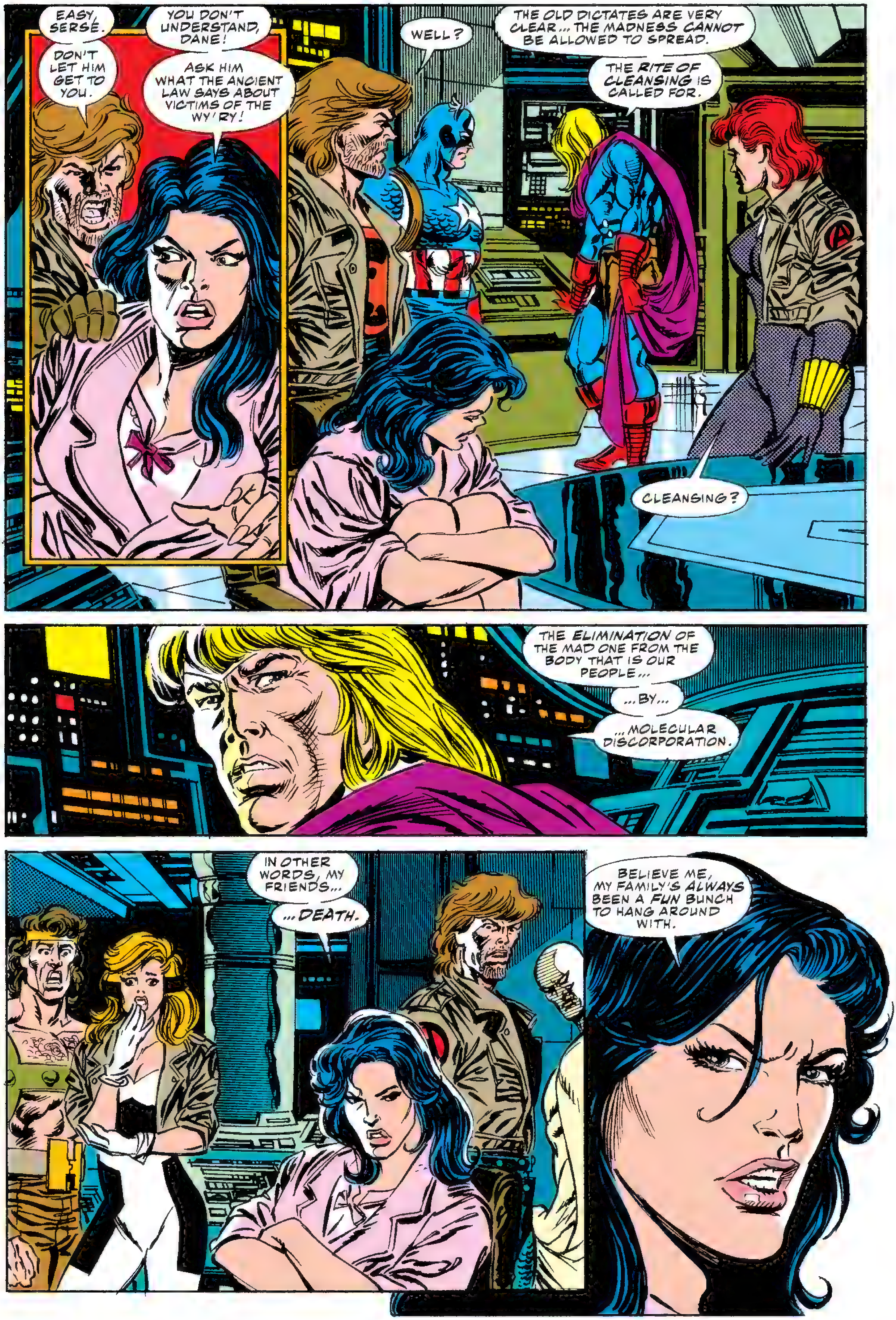

SO LITTLE TIME, SO MUCH TO DO.
BUT, PROCTOR, MY LORD AND MASTER, YOU INSISTED ON DAILY REPORTS AND WHO AM I TO REFUSE YOUR MAJESTY?
JUST A POOR LITTLE REFUGEE FROM ANOTHER TIME-LINE LIVING THE GOOD LIFE WITH EVERYONE'S FAVORITE ASSEMBLERS, PRETENDING TO BE ONE OF THEM.
PROBLEM IS, THE VISION OF THIS WORLD IS SO DULL, I FEEL LIKE I'M IMPERSONATING LAST NIGHT'S WASH.
IF I SAY THE WORD 'LOGICAL' ONE MORE TIME, I'M GOING TO SHOOT MYSELF... BUT THEY SEEM TO EXPECT THAT OF ME.
ANYWAY, HAVEN'T OFFED THE SWORDSMAN YET.
YOU WERE RIGHT; WHEN I GOT HERE YOUR WIFE, SERSI, WAS CREATING QUITE THE RUCKUS AND I DECIDED TO LAY LOW.
SHE MUST HAVE BEEN A HANDFUL, PROCTOR, M'MAN. YOU LUCKY DOG.
SPEAKING OF WHICH -- THIS TEAM'S GOT SOME SERIOUSLY ATTRACTIVE WOMEN...
...ESPECIALLY CRYSTAL.
I MAY GET TO KNOW OUR LITTLE ELEMENTAL A LOT BETTER BEFORE I LEAVE HERE.
A BOY'S GOT-- WHAT?!
FRAKA-SHAM!

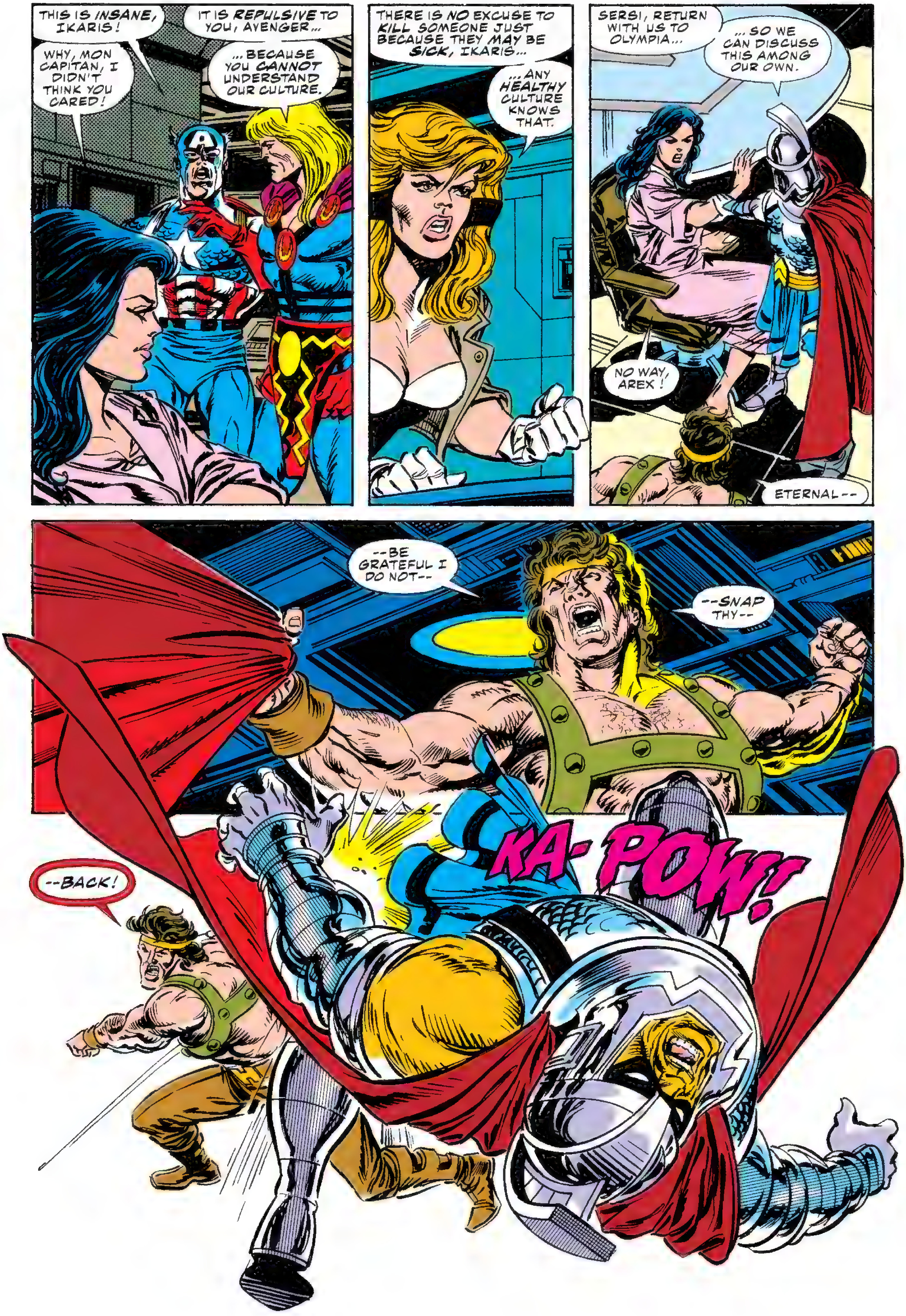

LEAVE US, AVENGER.
WE HAVE NEED OF THIS CHAMBER.
NO HUMAN -- REAL OR SYNTHETIC -- IS ALLOWED.
I DON'T LIKE THE TONE IN YOUR VOICE, FRIEND.
YOU HAVE SOMETHING AGAINST SYNTHEZOIDS?!
VISION -- ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
BLACK WIDOW--? YES, I AM WELL.
BUT THIS INTRUDER ATTACKED ME IN A MOST ILLOGICAL MANNER.
IKARIS, WE MAY NOT BE IMMORTAL LIKE YOU...
...BUT, BELIEVE ME, WE CAN GIVE AS GOOD AS WE GET.
WE ARE HERE FOR SERSI, AND IT IS A PRIVATE AFFAIR...
...SHE IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY.
HOW DARE YOU?! I AM NO MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY!
FSHAKT
I'M AN AVENGER NOW, IKARIS...
...AND WHAT CAN BE SAID TO ME...
...CAN BE SAID TO THEM! SO OUT WITH IT, COUSIN!

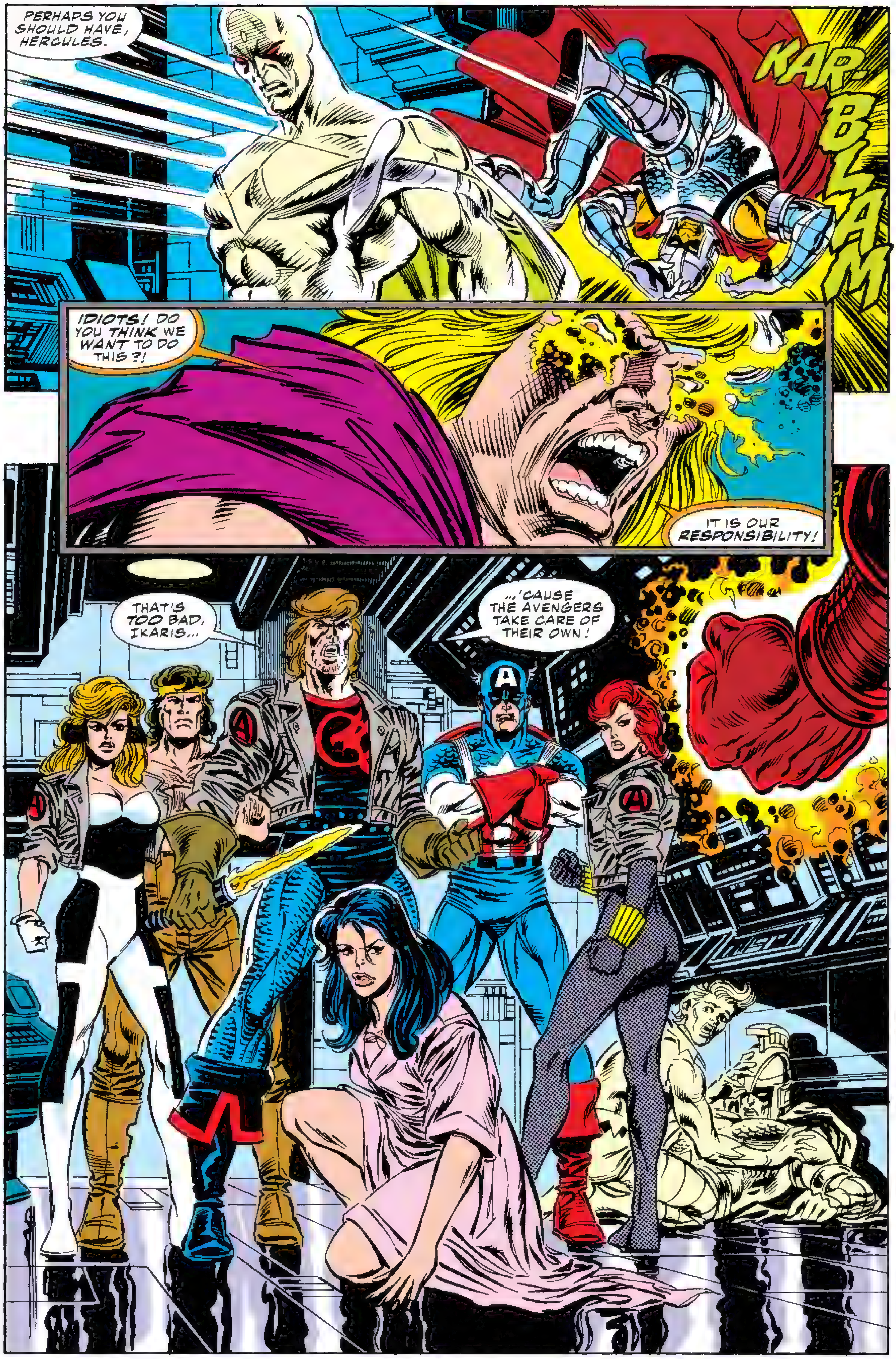

VERY WELL.
SERSI, WE FEAR THE *MAHD W'YRY* HAS CLAIMED YOU.
I KNEW IT!
OH, IKARIS, YOU ARE SO VERY FOOLISH! THE W'YRY!
SERSI, WHAT BE THIS 'WEARY'?
A FOLKTALE, HERCULES. A FICTION, NOTHING MORE.
YOU'VE COME A LONG WAY FOR A 'FICTION,' IKARIS. WHAT'S GOING ON?
IF SERSI HAS NO SHAME, THEN BEHOLD, MORTALS, AND LEARN THIS DAY--
--THE SECRET *CURSE* OF THE *ETERNALS!*
"EONS AGO, THE SPACE GODS KNOWN ONLY AS THE *CELESTIALS* ARRIVED ON THIS PLANET FROM THE *FURTHEST* DEPTHS OF SPACE.
"DABBLERS IN THE STUFF OF LIFE, THEY WERE, GENETIC ENGINEERS ON A COSMIC SCALE.
"AND THUS, THESE SILENT LEVIATHANS TOOK UNTO THEM A GROUP OF PRIMEVAL HUMANS AND *REMADE* THEM, SHAPING THEM INTO A *NEW* IMAGE.
"THE POWER OF THE COSMOS ITSELF WAS GIVEN TO THESE CHOSEN FEW, THE *FIRST* ETERNALS, WHICH IMBUED THEM WITH MANY GIFTS: VAST POWERS, NIGH-ETERNAL LIFE...
"...AND THE *GREATEST* BOON OF ALL, THE ABILITY TO MAKE MANIFEST A GROUP CONSCIOUSNESS, THE JOYFUL FUSION OF BODY AND SOUL WHEREIN WE BECAME ONE: THE SINGULAR AND SACRED *UNI-MIND*."


WE ARE *ALL* AWARE OF YOUR PEOPLE'S HISTORY, IKARIS.
I THINK NOT, WOMAN...
...FOR THERE IS MUCH WE *NEVER* DISCUSS WITH OUTSIDERS.
"THE CELESTIALS WERE NOT *OMNIPOTENT.* THEY WERE *NOT* CREATORS OF LIFE, MERELY BEINGS WHO TRANSFIGURED WHAT *ALREADY* EXISTED.
"AND THERE *WERE* LIMITATIONS TO THEIR CONSIDERABLE SKILL.
"FOR, WHEN THE ETERNALS WERE CHANGED PHYSICALLY, THE TEMPLATE FOR OUR BRAINS--OUR VERY *MINDS* --REMAINED ALL TOO *HUMAN.*
"YES, OUR BODIES COULD LAST FOREVER, BUT NO ONE KNEW HOW LONG A HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS COULD LAST.
"HOW MUCH *EXPERIENCE* COULD A BEING ABSORB? HOW MUCH *LIVING* BEFORE THE WEIGHT OF YEARS PROVED TOO MUCH AND *CRUSHED* THE SOUL?
"HOW LONG BEFORE THE MIND *WEARIES* OF LIVING AND CAN DO IT NO MORE?"
THE UNI-MIND, WE BELIEVE, WAS FORMED TO HELP WASH AWAY OUR ANXIETIES... OUR FEARS, AS A TYPE OF STOPGAP TO PREVENT THE W'YRY.
"BUT NOW THERE ARE *TOO FEW* OF US TO CREATE THE UNION, AND WE SIT AND WAIT AND *FEAR* THE DAY WHEN WE HAVE ALL LIVED TOO LONG...
"...AND WE GO MAD."


WAIT A MINUTE...
...ARE YOU SAYING THAT SERSI IS SUFFERING FROM SOME TYPE OF... SENILITY?
WE HAVE SENSED HER GROWING UNEASE, AVENGER. THE POSSIBILITY CANNOT BE DENIED.
SERSI HAS EVER BEEN THE MOST ECCENTRIC OF OUR PEOPLE... BUT EVEN YOU CANNOT DENY HER ACTIONS ARE INCREASINGLY... UNSTABLE.
AND NO ACT MORE SO THAN WHEN SHE FORMED A UNI-MIND WITH OUR DISTANT COUSINS, THE BRETHREN! *
SUCH CROSS-SPECIES CONTACT HAS ALWAYS BEEN STRICTLY FORBIDDEN! WE HAVE LONG BEEN TAUGHT THAT IT COULD HASTEN THE BREAKDOWN OF OUR MENTAL DISCIPLINES!
* REMEMBER THE COLLECTION OBSESSION? SEE HOW EVERYTHING'S CONNECTED? -RALFIE
BUT SERSI SAW FIT TO IGNORE THE OLD WAYS.
THEY NEEDED MY HELP, IKARIS.
THE ENTIRE PLANET WAS ENDANGERED, COUSIN...
...BUT YOU WOULDN'T KNOW THAT, WOULD YOU?
NO, YOU AND THE OTHERS HIDE IN OLYMPIA, DREAMING OF DAYS GONE BY, AND GLORIES LOST... FEARING THE FUTURE!
THERE IS SOMETHING WRONG WITH ME. I'M NO FOOL-- BUT I REJECT YOUR ARCHIAC FEARS!
DO YOU HEAR ME?!

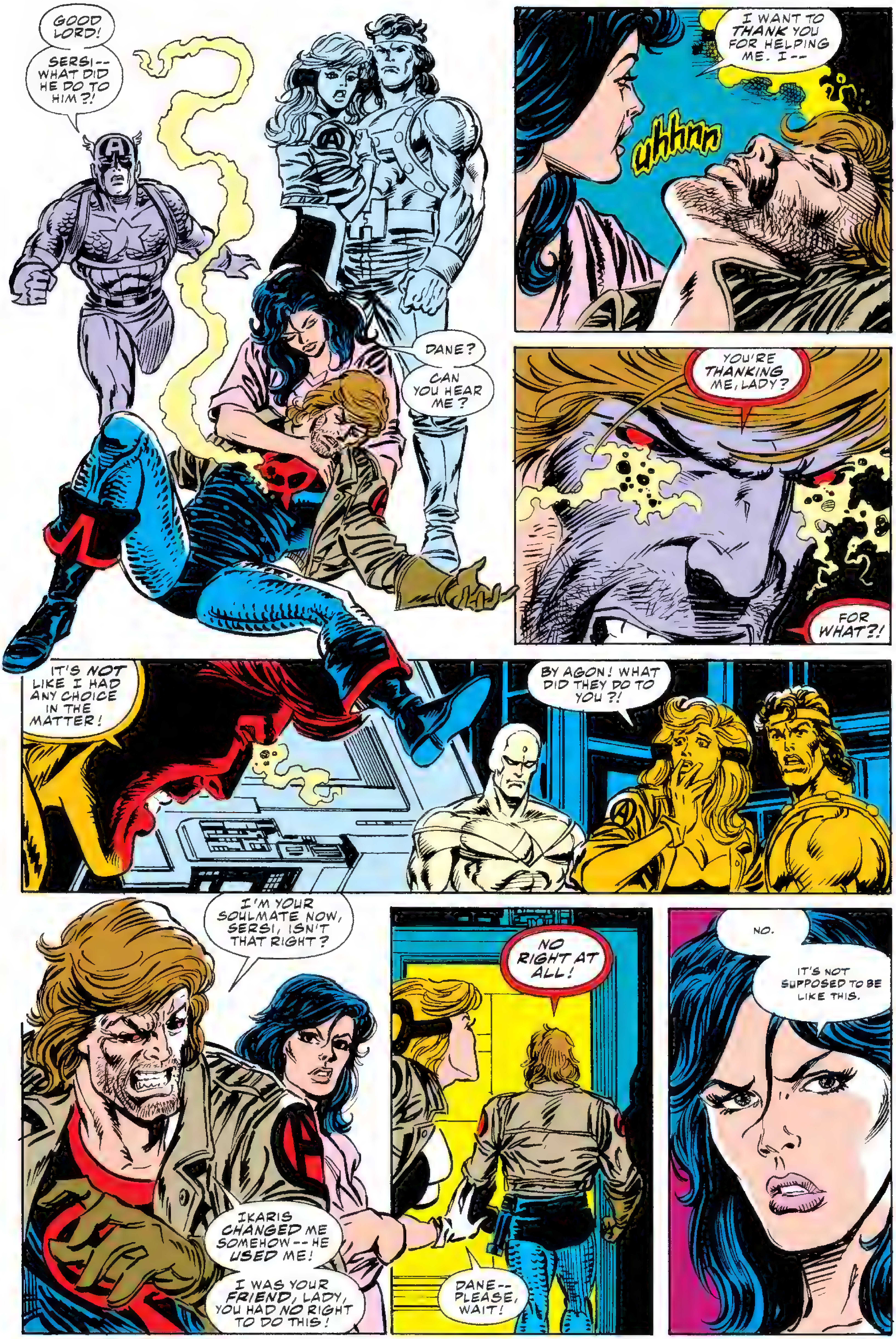

EASY, SERSE.
DON'T LET HIM GET TO YOU.
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND, DANE!
ASK HIM WHAT THE ANCIENT LAW SAYS ABOUT VICTIMS OF THE WY'RY!
WELL?
THE OLD DICTATES ARE VERY CLEAR... THE MADNESS CANNOT BE ALLOWED TO SPREAD.
THE *RITE OF CLEANSING* IS CALLED FOR.
CLEANSING?
THE *ELIMINATION* OF THE MAD ONE FROM THE BODY THAT IS OUR PEOPLE...
...BY...
...MOLECULAR DISCORPORATION.
IN OTHER WORDS, MY FRIENDS...
...*DEATH.*
BELIEVE ME, MY FAMILY'S *ALWAYS* BEEN A *FUN* BUNCH TO HANG AROUND WITH.

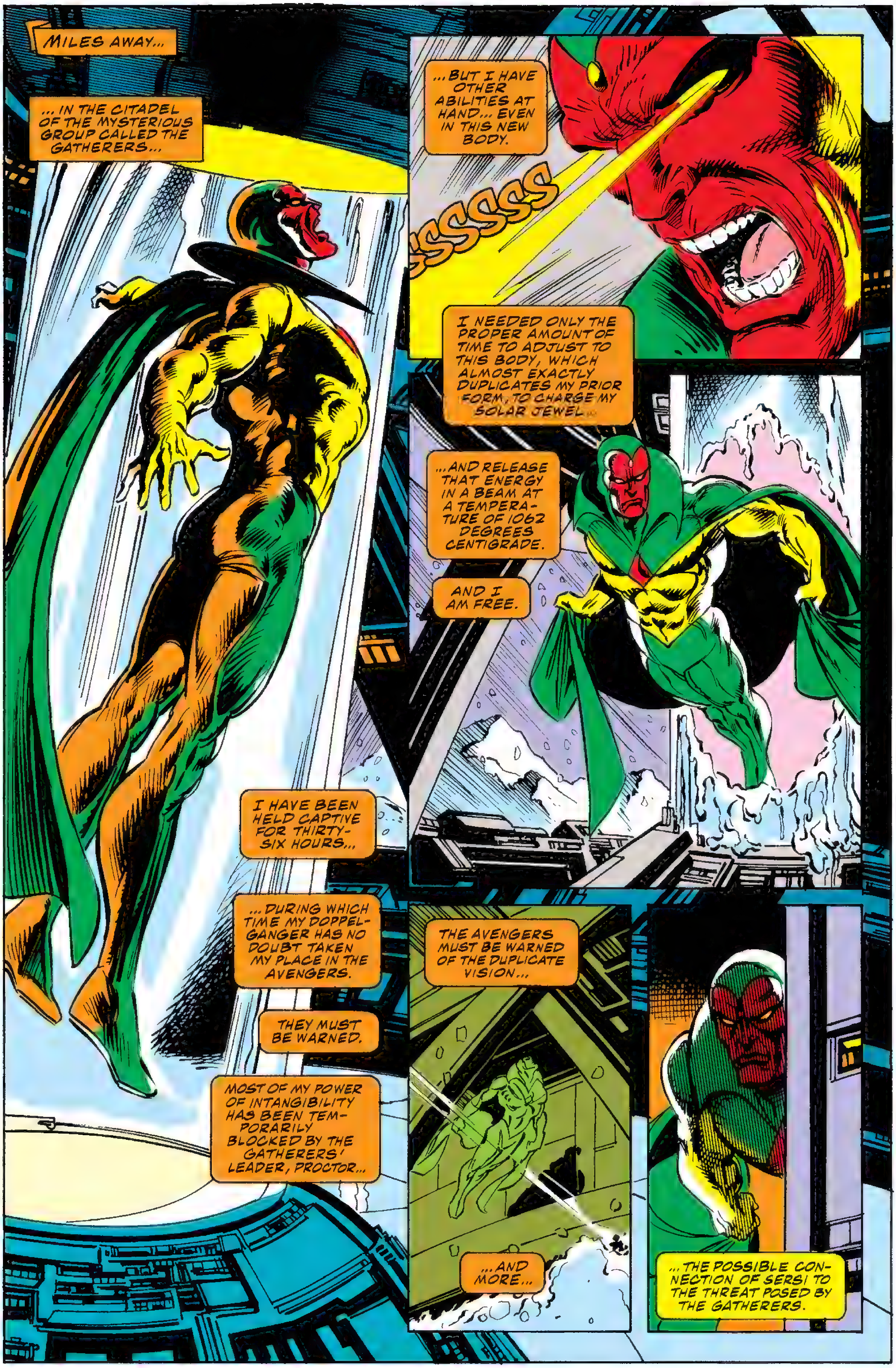

THIS IS *INSANE,* IKARIS!
WHY, MON CAPITAN, I DIDN'T THINK YOU CARED!
IT IS *REPULSIVE* TO YOU, AVENGER...
...BECAUSE YOU *CANNOT* UNDERSTAND OUR CULTURE.
THERE IS *NO* EXCUSE TO *KILL* SOMEONE JUST BECAUSE THEY *MAY* BE *SICK,* IKARIS...
...ANY *HEALTHY* CULTURE KNOWS THAT.
SERSI, RETURN WITH US TO OLYMPIA...
...SO WE CAN DISCUSS THIS AMONG OUR OWN.
NO WAY, AREX!
ETERNAL--
--BE GRATEFUL I DO NOT--
--SNAP THY--
--BACK!
KA-POW!!


PERHAPS YOU SHOULD HAVE, HERCULES.
KAR-BLAM
IDIOTS! DO YOU THINK WE WANT TO DO THIS?!
IT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY!
THAT'S TOO BAD, IKARIS...
...'CAUSE THE AVENGERS TAKE CARE OF THEIR OWN!

THEN PAY THE PRICE OF YOUR FOOLISH BLINDNESS!
RRRIIIPP
IKARIS, YOU MORON! STOP!
THIS ISN'T GOING TO WORK AND YOU KNOW IT!
SERSI IS THE MOST POWERFUL AMONG US. WE CAN'T MAKE HER COME BACK WITH US...
...AND FRANKLY, GIVEN ALL THIS 'CLEANSING' STUFF, I CAN'T BLAME HER.
BUT, SERSI, YOU'VE GOT TO BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF.
YOU'RE TERRIFIED THE MAHD WY'RY IS REAL AND THAT YOU MAY BE SUFFERING FROM IT.
YOU DON'T WANT US HERE, AND THAT'S FINE, REALLY!
BUT WE NEED SOMEONE TO GAUGE SERSI JUST IN CASE...
...AND YOU'RE THE ONE TO DO IT!
I SAY MAKE HIM OFFICIALLY A GANN JOSIN RIGHT NOW!
WHAT?

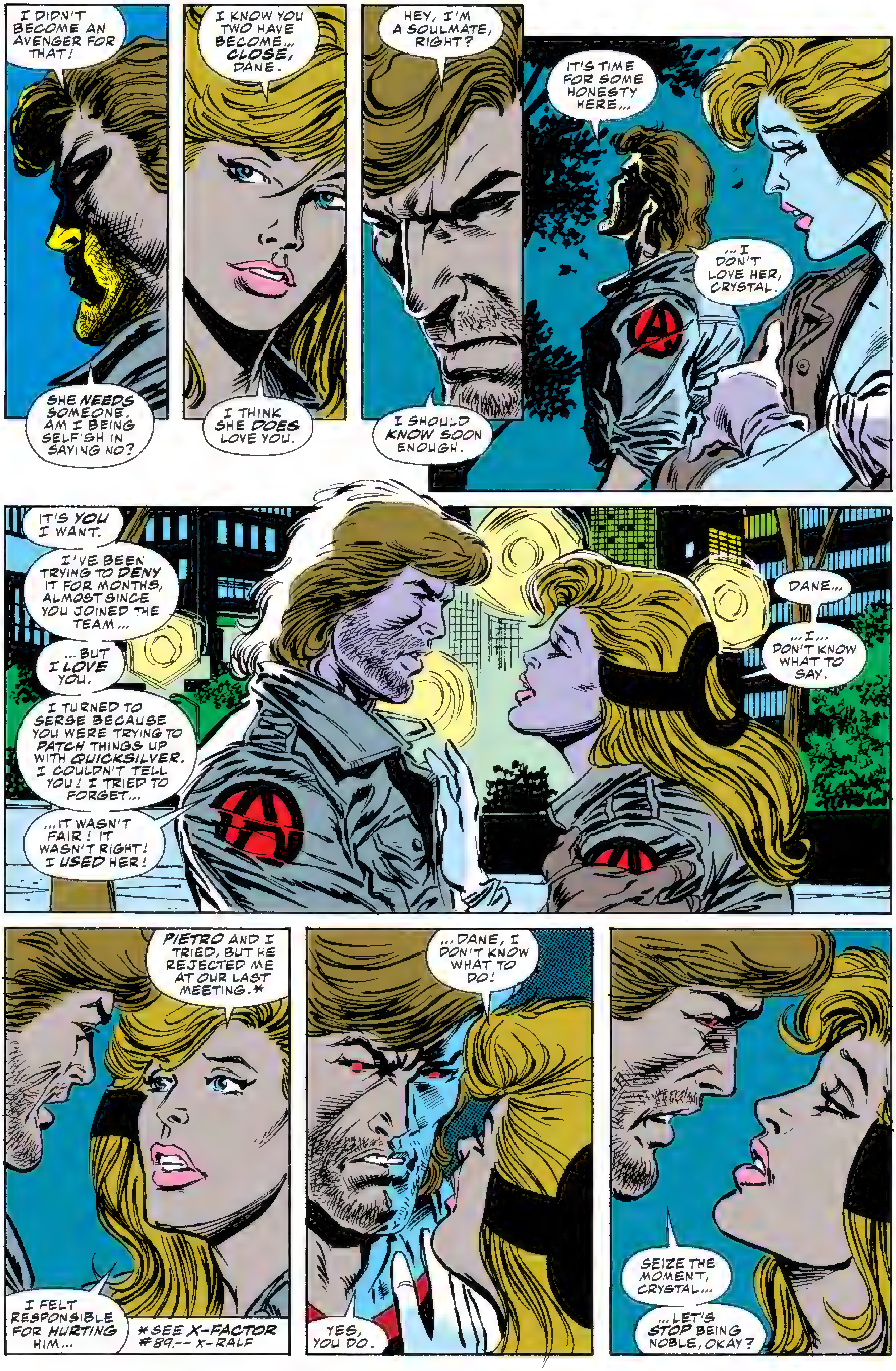
I WOULD AGREE TO THAT.
NOW, LET'S JUST HOLD ON HERE--!
NO. THE TIME FOR DISCUSSION IS OVER.
YOU HAVE STATED YOUR DESIRE FOR RESPONSIBILITY...
URGGH!
...THEN, POOR FOOLS...
...YOU SHALL HAVE IT!
VUMMPT
BE WARNED, SERSI...
...WE WILL BE WATCHING.

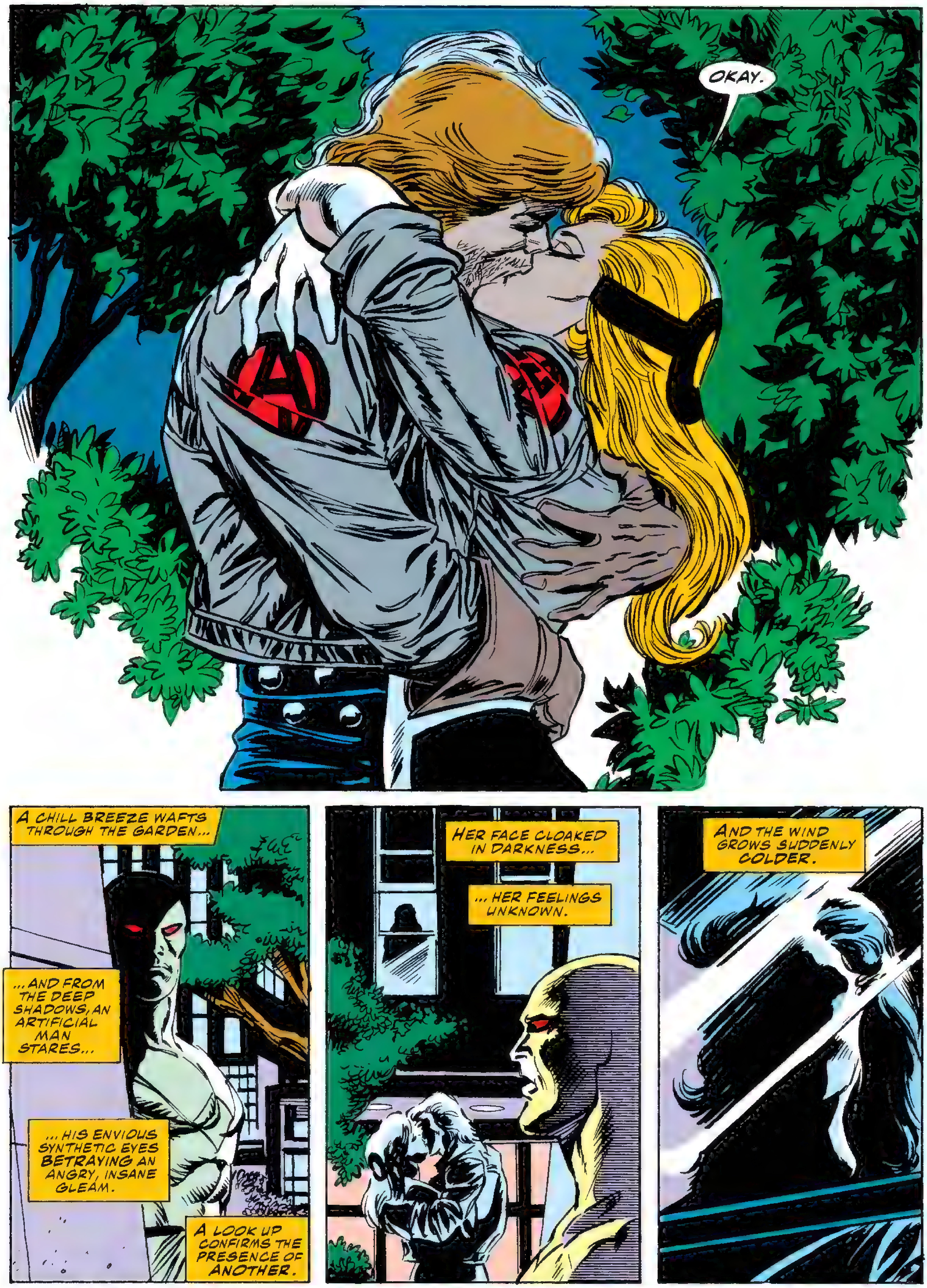

GOOD LORD!
SERSI-- WHAT DID HE DO TO HIM?!
DANE?
CAN YOU HEAR ME?
I WANT TO THANK YOU FOR HELPING ME. I--
uhhnn
YOU'RE THANKING ME, LADY?
FOR WHAT?!
IT'S NOT LIKE I HAD ANY CHOICE IN THE MATTER!
BY AGON! WHAT DID THEY DO TO YOU?!
I'M YOUR SOULMATE NOW, SERSI, ISN'T THAT RIGHT?
IKARIS CHANGED ME SOMEHOW -- HE USED ME!
I WAS YOUR FRIEND, LADY, YOU HAD NO RIGHT TO DO THIS!
NO RIGHT AT ALL!
DANE-- PLEASE, WAIT!
NO.
IT'S NOT SUPPOSED TO BE LIKE THIS.


MILES AWAY...
...IN THE CITADEL OF THE MYSTERIOUS GROUP CALLED THE GATHERERS...
...BUT I HAVE OTHER ABILITIES AT HAND... EVEN IN THIS NEW BODY.
SSSSSSS
I NEEDED ONLY THE PROPER AMOUNT OF TIME TO ADJUST TO THIS BODY, WHICH ALMOST EXACTLY DUPLICATES MY PRIOR FORM, TO CHARGE MY SOLAR JEWEL...
...AND RELEASE THAT ENERGY IN A BEAM AT A TEMPERATURE OF 1062 DEGREES CENTIGRADE.
AND I AM FREE.
I HAVE BEEN HELD CAPTIVE FOR THIRTY-SIX HOURS...
...DURING WHICH TIME MY DOPPELGANGER HAS NO DOUBT TAKEN MY PLACE IN THE AVENGERS.
THEY MUST BE WARNED.
MOST OF MY POWER OF INTANGIBILITY HAS BEEN TEMPORARILY BLOCKED BY THE GATHERERS' LEADER, PROCTOR...
THE AVENGERS MUST BE WARNED OF THE DUPLICATE VISION...
...AND MORE...
...THE POSSIBLE CONNECTION OF SERSI TO THE THREAT POSED BY THE GATHERERS.

FAKA-BOOM!
VERY GOOD, VISION. VERY, VERY GOOD.
I EXPECTED YOU TO ATTEMPT ESCAPE, BUT THAT IS NOT POSSIBLE AT THIS TIME.
YOU KNOW TOO MUCH.
PROCTOR!
WHAT IS IT I KNOW, GATHERER?
YOUR SPECIOUS CLAIM TO BE SERSI'S HUSBAND? NEVER IN ALL HER TIME WITH THE AVENGERS DID SHE MENTION ANY MARRIAGE.
SZZZZZZ
TO ONE SUCH AS SERSI, VISION...
...SUCH AN ALLIANCE IS AT MOST A PASSING THING!
THWAK!
BUT I AM HER ONE, TRUE GANN JOSIN, VISION...
...I AM THE ONLY ONE WHO KNOWS WHAT SHE IS ABOUT TO BECOME!

AVENGERS MANSION.
DANE...?
IF YOU WANT TO BE ALONE, I'LL LEAVE.
I DON'T THINK I *CAN* BE ALONE NOW, CRYSTAL...
...I THINK I'M BEGINNING TO FEEL HER THOUGHTS ALREADY, THANKS TO IKARIS.
ISN'T LIFE GREAT? INSTANT *EMPATHY* IN ONE EASY LESSON.
MY GOD, SHE'S SO CONFUSED...
...AND SCARED.
SHE'S NOT THE ONLY ONE.
MAYBE THE *VISION* OR *HANK PYM* CAN *UNDO* WHAT THE ETERNALS HAVE DONE. PERHAPS--?
AND IS *THAT* RIGHT, CRYS?
ISN'T THAT TURNING MY BACK ON A PERSON IN TROUBLE?


I DIDN'T BECOME AN AVENGER FOR THAT!
SHE NEEDS SOMEONE. AM I BEING SELFISH IN SAYING NO?
I KNOW YOU TWO HAVE BECOME... CLOSE, DANE.
I THINK SHE DOES LOVE YOU.
HEY, I'M A SOULMATE, RIGHT?
I SHOULD KNOW SOON ENOUGH.
IT'S TIME FOR SOME HONESTY HERE...
...I DON'T LOVE HER, CRYSTAL.
IT'S YOU I WANT.
I'VE BEEN TRYING TO DENY IT FOR MONTHS, ALMOST SINCE YOU JOINED THE TEAM...
...BUT I LOVE YOU.
I TURNED TO SERSE BECAUSE YOU WERE TRYING TO PATCH THINGS UP WITH QUICKSILVER. I COULDN'T TELL YOU! I TRIED TO FORGET...
...IT WASN'T FAIR! IT WASN'T RIGHT! I USED HER!
DANE...
...I... DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY.
PIETRO AND I TRIED, BUT HE REJECTED ME AT OUR LAST MEETING.*
I FELT RESPONSIBLE FOR HURTING HIM...
*SEE X-FACTOR #89.-- X-RALF
...DANE, I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO!
YES, YOU DO.
SEIZE THE MOMENT, CRYSTAL...
...LET'S STOP BEING NOBLE, OKAY?


OKAY.
A CHILL BREEZE WAFTS THROUGH THE GARDEN...
...AND FROM THE DEEP SHADOWS, AN ARTIFICIAL MAN STARES...
...HIS ENVIOUS SYNTHETIC EYES BETRAYING AN ANGRY, INSANE GLEAM.
A LOOK UP CONFIRMS THE PRESENCE OF ANOTHER.
HER FACE CLOAKED IN DARKNESS...
...HER FEELINGS UNKNOWN.
AND THE WIND GROWS SUDDENLY COLDER.

NEXT ISSUE: A VISION REVEALED!

"Most people who go to the beach work on their shell collection. The BLACK WIDOW, here, ain't no exception...but she likes to work on her *bullet* shell collection..."
AH!

MARVEL SWIMSUIT SPECIAL #2 PINUP BY ADAM HUGHES • TEXT BY DAN SLOTT

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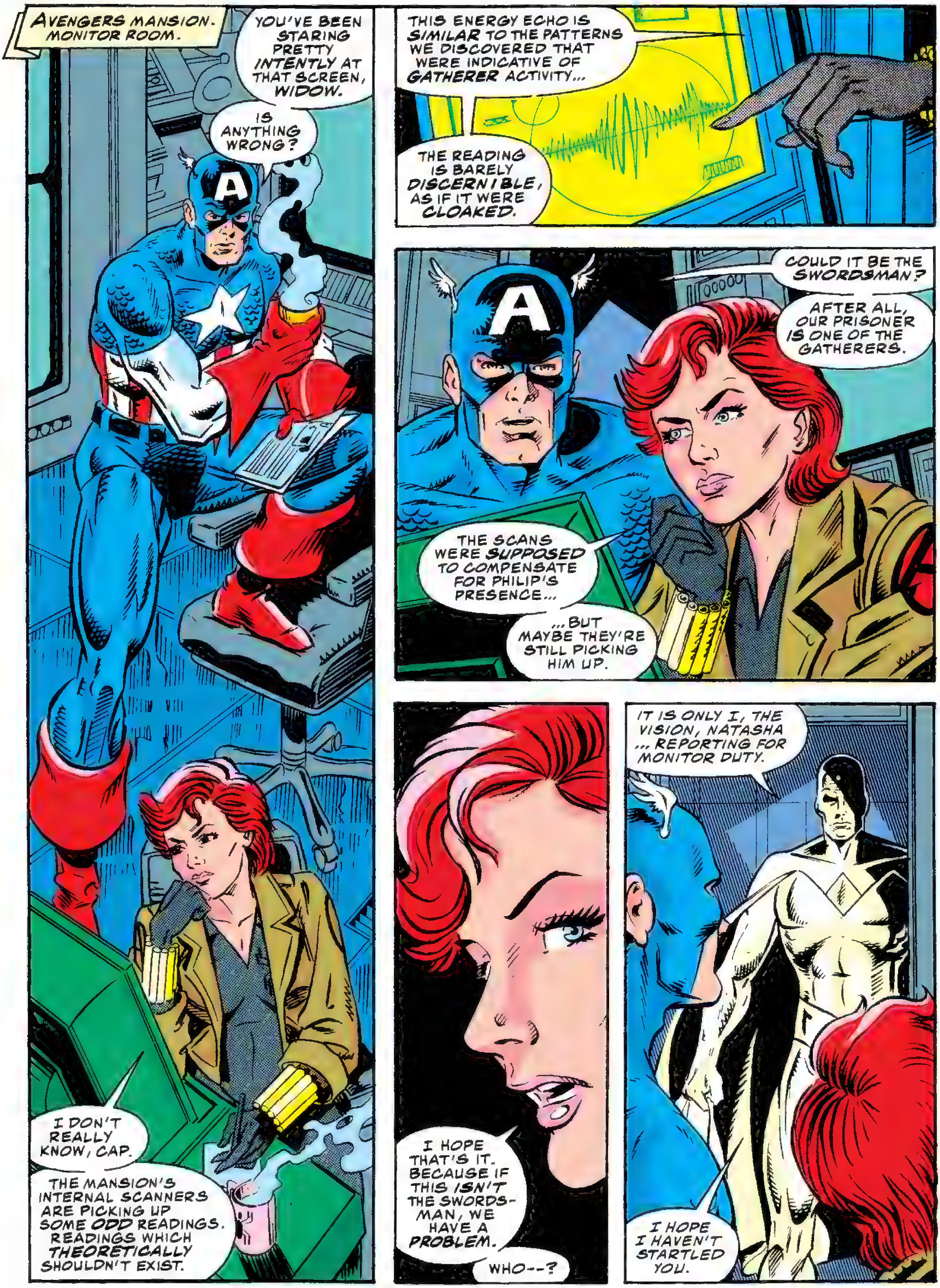
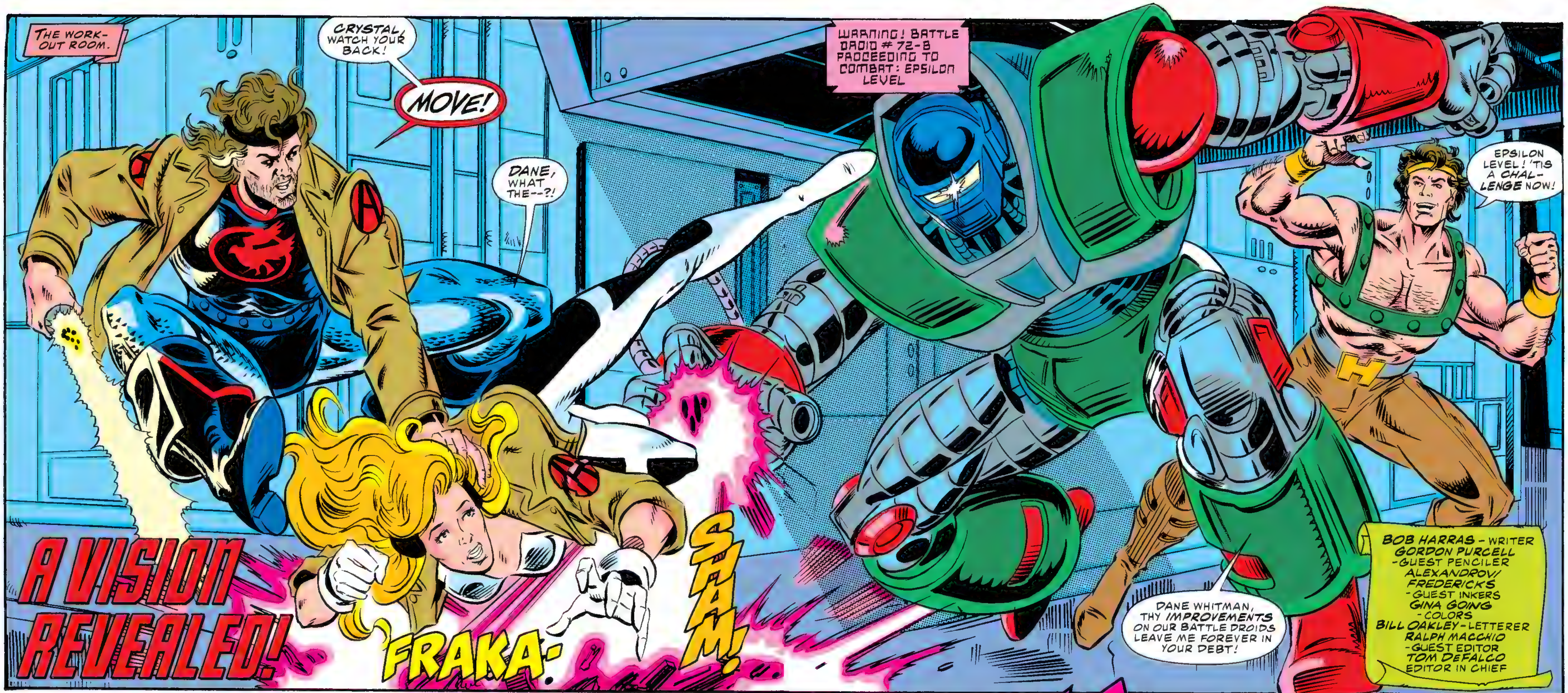
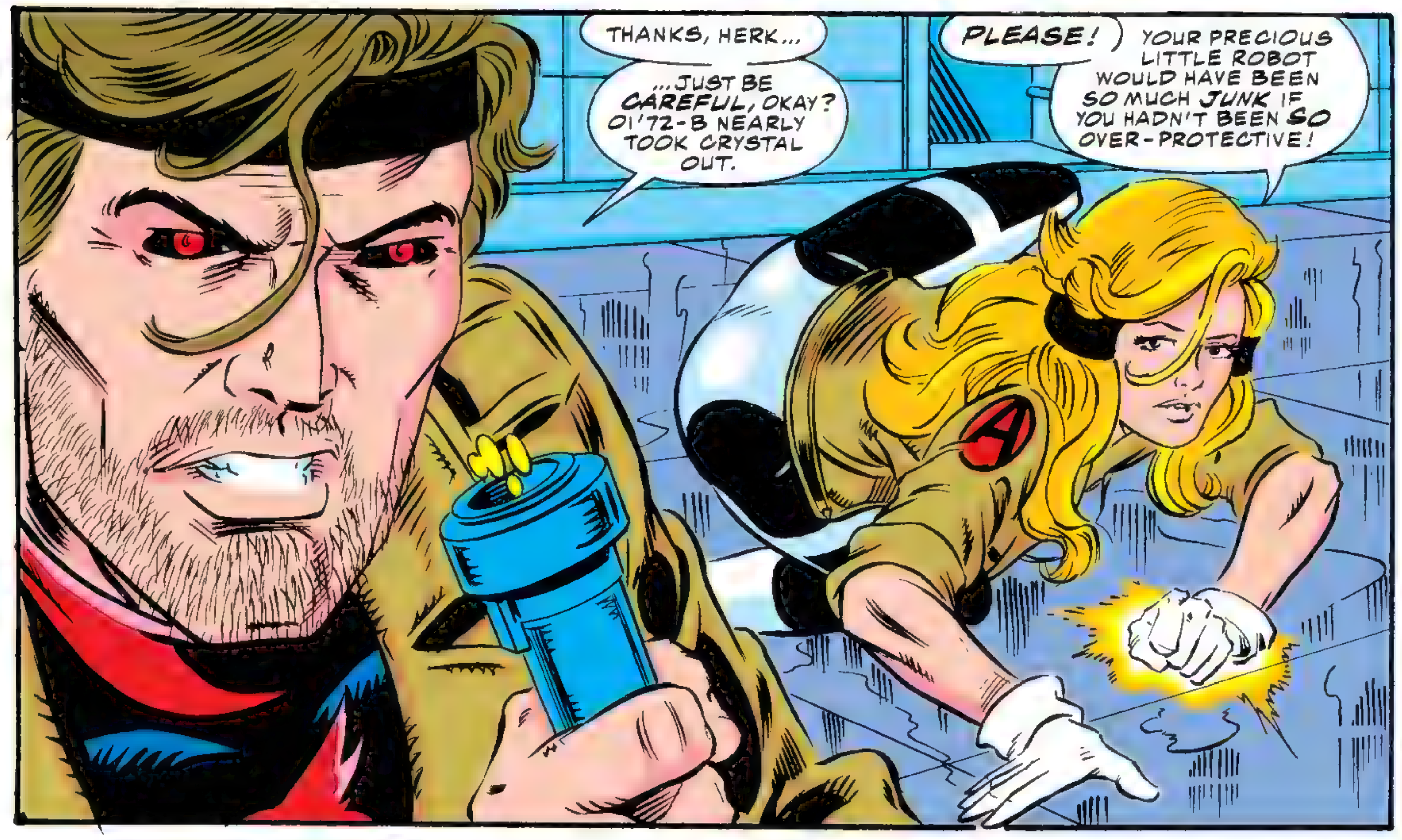
CONTINUING THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF THE
AVENGERS
VISION REVEALED

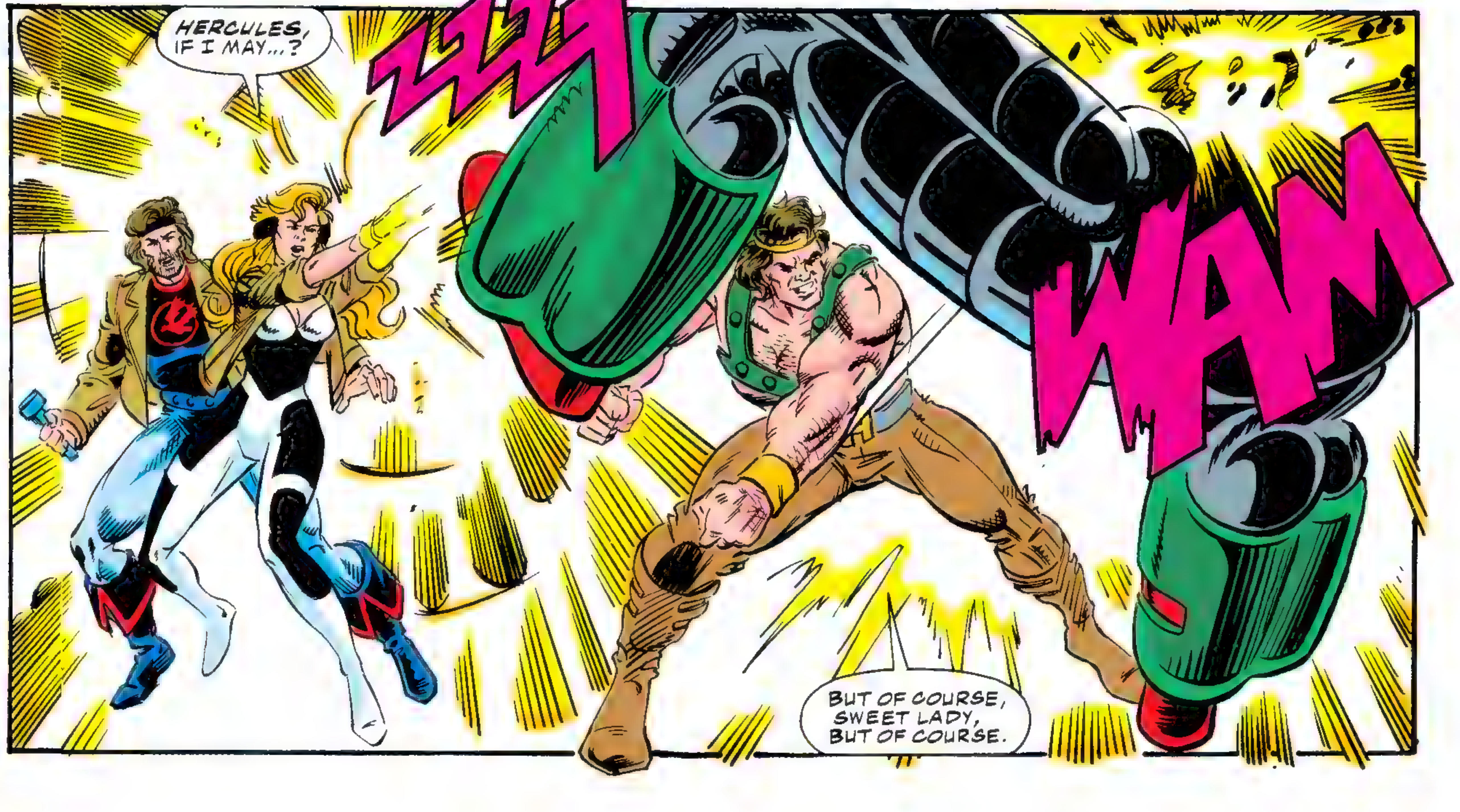
TO COMBAT THOSE THREATS WHICH NO SINGLE HERO CAN STAND AGAINST, EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES HAVE FORGED A COVENANT TO UNITE IN BATTLE FOR THE PROTECTION OF ALL MANKIND!

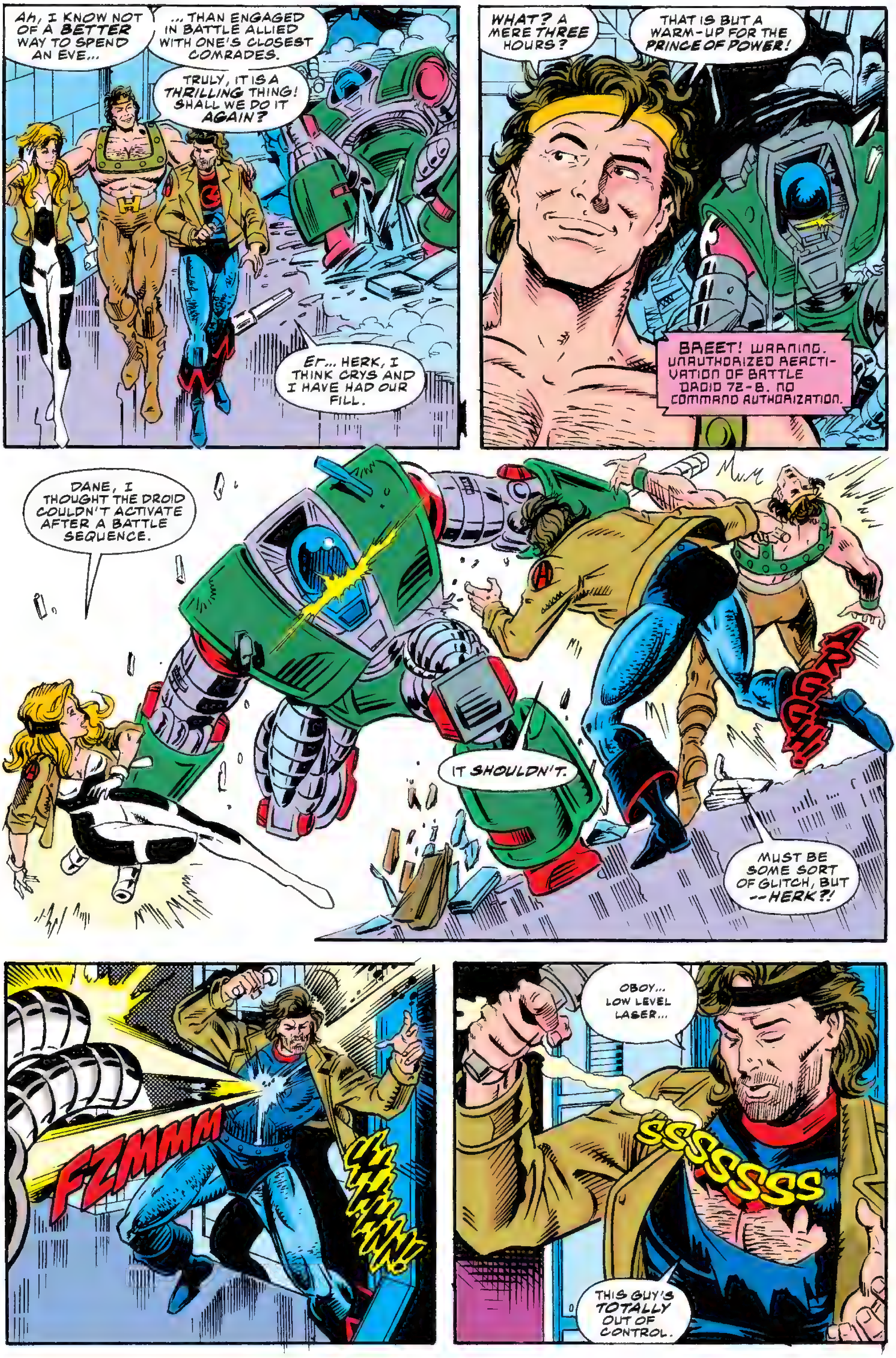
STAN LEE PRESENTS . . . THE MIGHTY AVENGERS!

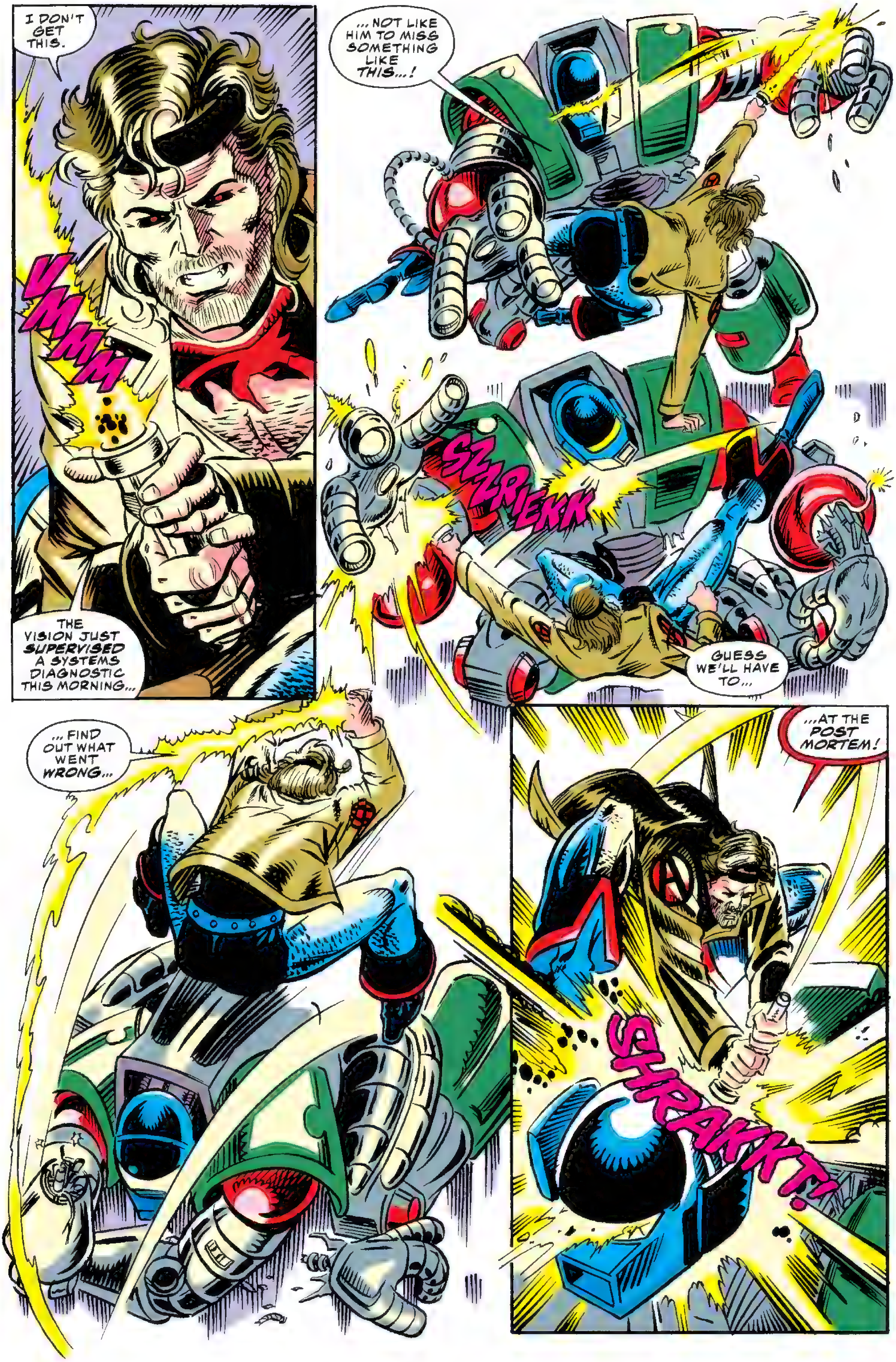

AVENGERS MANSION. MONITOR ROOM.
YOU'VE BEEN STARING PRETTY INTENTLY AT THAT SCREEN, WIDOW.
IS ANYTHING WRONG?
I DON'T REALLY KNOW, CAP.
THE MANSION'S INTERNAL SCANNERS ARE PICKING UP SOME ODD READINGS. READINGS WHICH THEORETICALLY SHOULDN'T EXIST.
THIS ENERGY ECHO IS SIMILAR TO THE PATTERNS WE DISCOVERED THAT WERE INDICATIVE OF GATHERER ACTIVITY...
THE READING IS BARELY DISCERNIBLE, AS IF IT WERE CLOAKED.
COULD IT BE THE SWORDSMAN?
AFTER ALL, OUR PRISONER IS ONE OF THE GATHERERS.
THE SCANS WERE SUPPOSED TO COMPENSATE FOR PHILIP'S PRESENCE...
...BUT MAYBE THEY'RE STILL PICKING HIM UP.
I HOPE THAT'S IT. BECAUSE IF THIS ISN'T THE SWORDSMAN, WE HAVE A PROBLEM.
WHO--?
IT IS ONLY I, THE VISION, NATASHA ... REPORTING FOR MONITOR DUTY.
I HOPE I HAVEN'T STARTLED YOU.

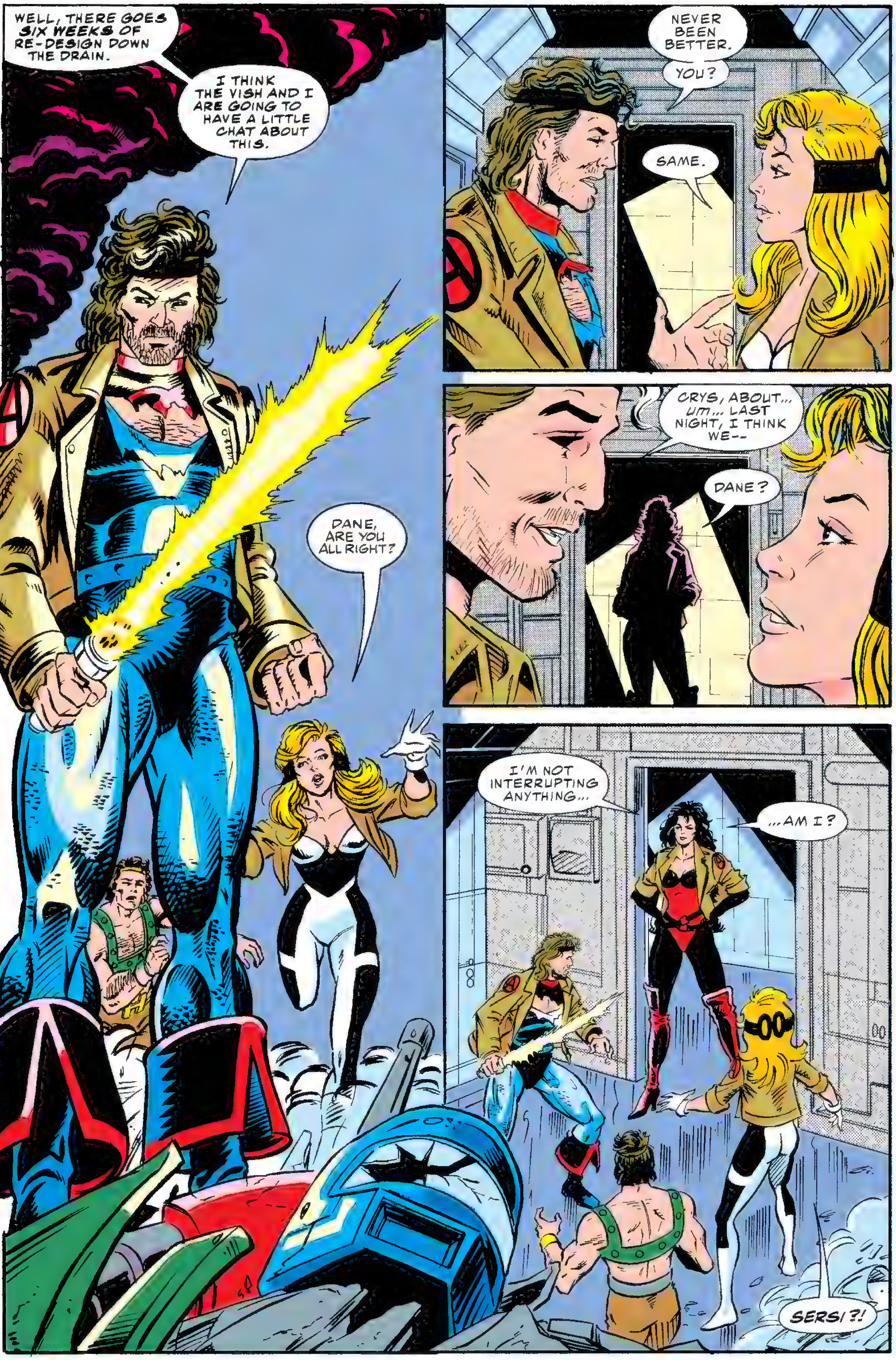

THE WORK-OUT ROOM.
CRYSTAL, WATCH YOUR BACK!
MOVE!
WARNING! BATTLE DROID # 72-B PROCEEDING TO COMBAT: EPSILON LEVEL
DANE, WHAT THE--?!
EPSILON LEVEL! 'TIS A CHALLENGE NOW!
A VISION REVEALED!
FRAKA:
SHAM!
DANE WHITMAN, THY IMPROVEMENTS ON OUR BATTLE DROIDS LEAVE ME FOREVER IN YOUR DEBT!
BOB HARRAS - WRITER
GORDON PURCELL -GUEST PENCILER
ALEXANDROV/ FREDERICKS -GUEST INKERS
GINA GOING -COLORS
BILL OAKLEY - LETTERER
RALPH MACCHIO -GUEST EDITOR
TOM DEFALCO EDITOR IN CHIEF

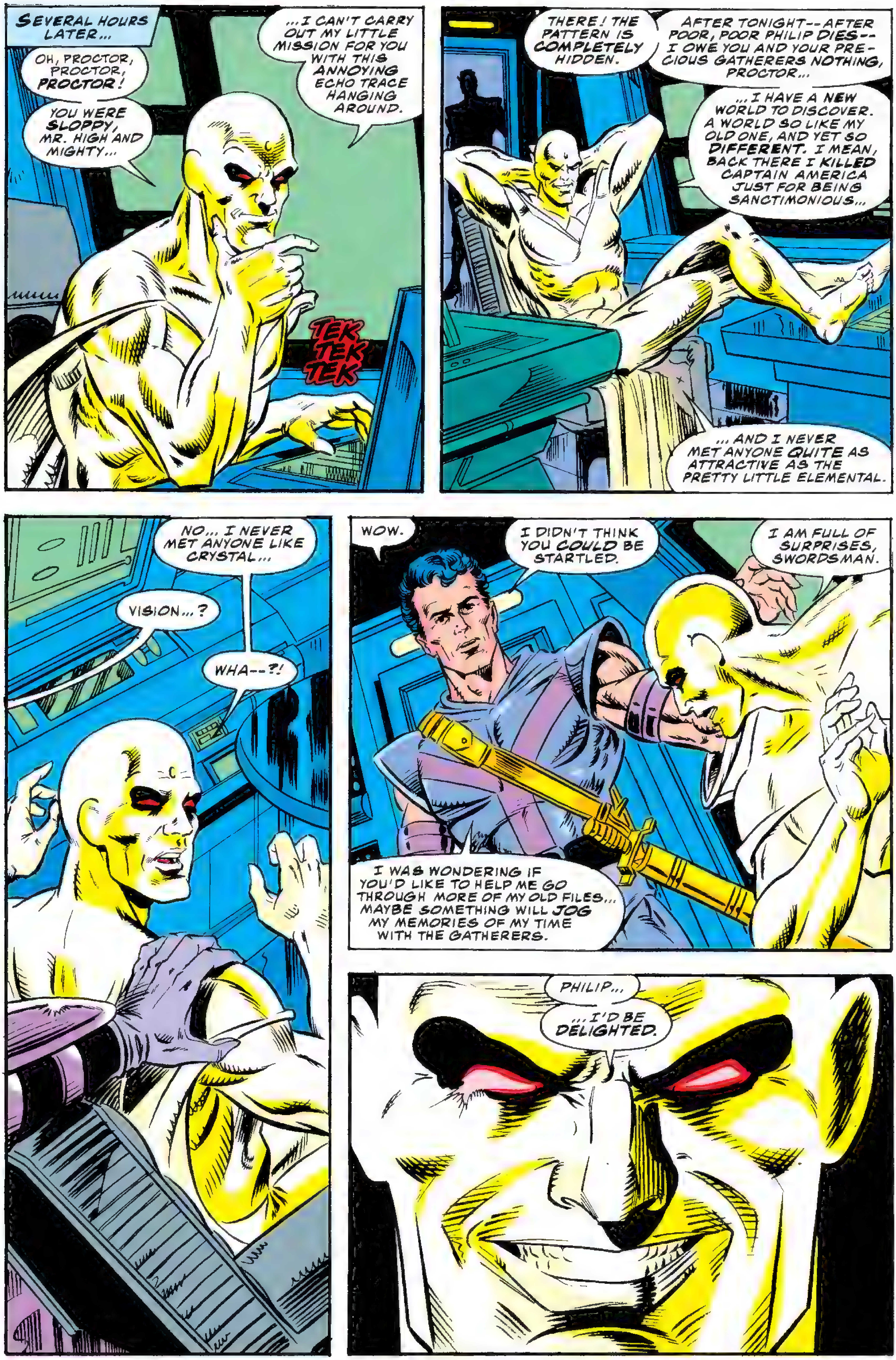

THANKS, HERK...
...JUST BE CAREFUL, OKAY? OL' 72-B NEARLY TOOK CRYSTAL OUT.
PLEASE!
YOUR PRECIOUS LITTLE ROBOT WOULD HAVE BEEN SO MUCH JUNK IF YOU HADN'T BEEN SO OVER-PROTECTIVE!

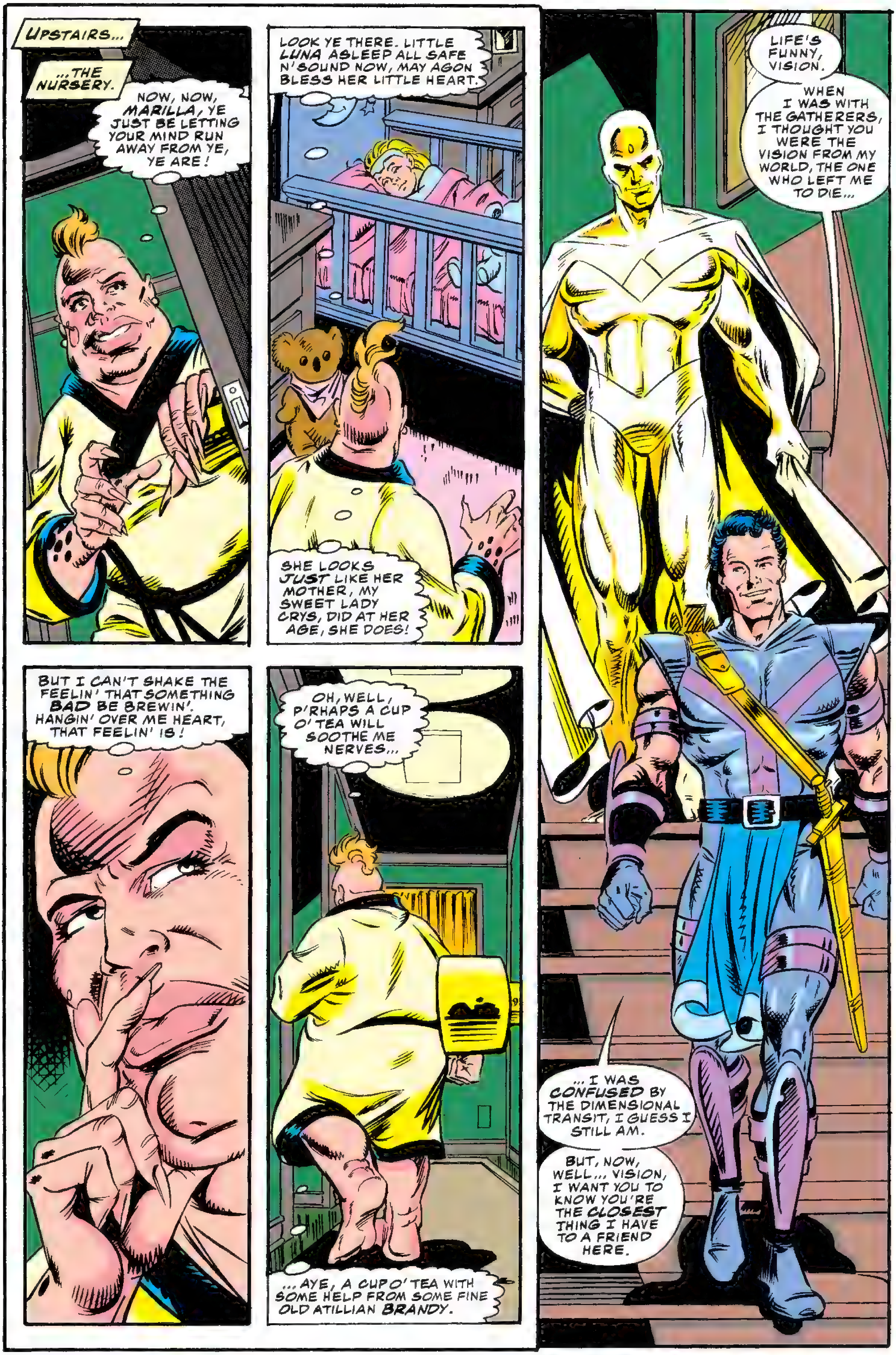

HERCULES, IF I MAY...?
ZZZT
WAM
BUT OF COURSE, SWEET LADY, BUT OF COURSE.

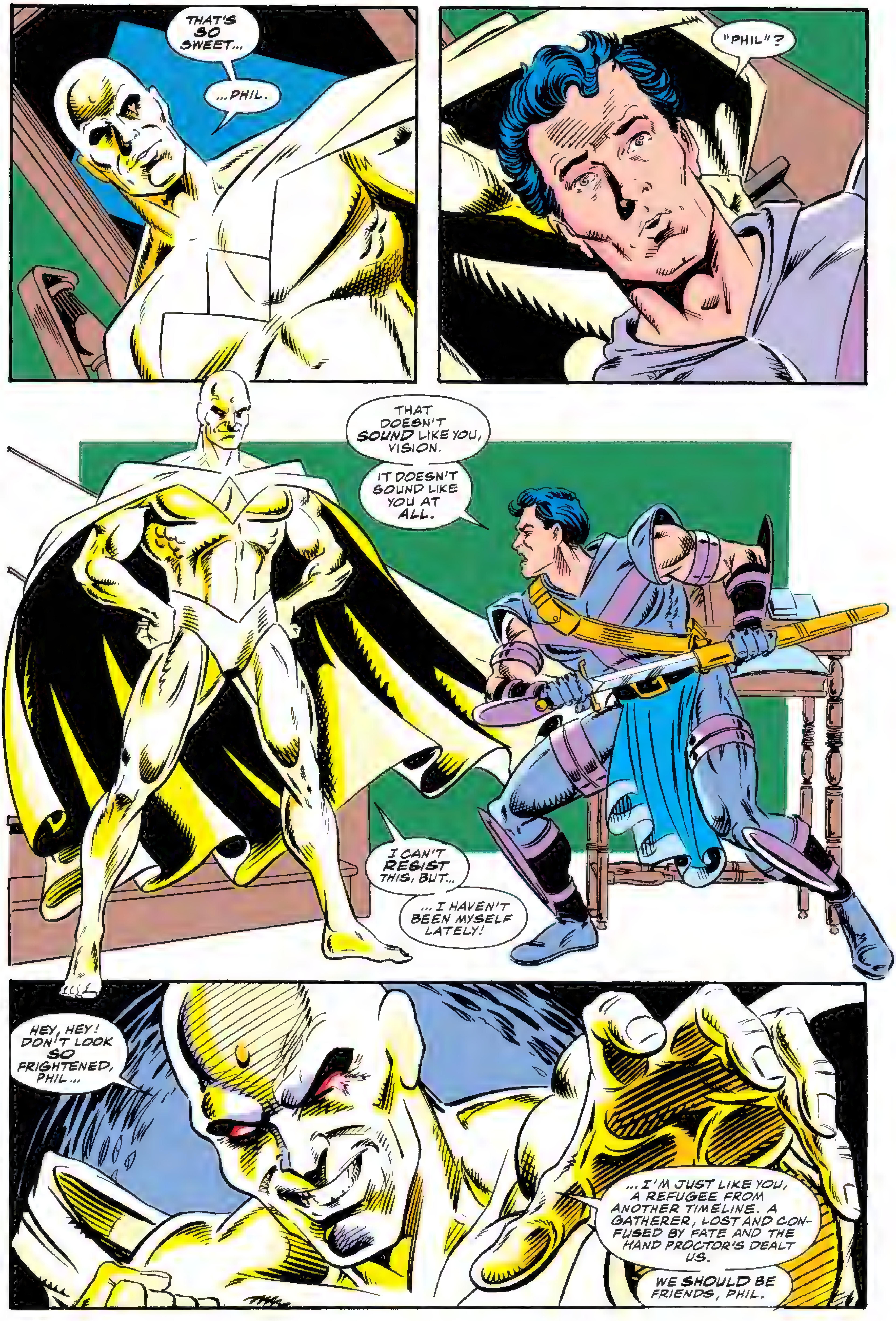

Ah, I KNOW NOT OF A BETTER WAY TO SPEND AN EVE...
...THAN ENGAGED IN BATTLE ALLIED WITH ONE'S CLOSEST COMRADES.
TRULY, IT IS A THRILLING THING! SHALL WE DO IT AGAIN?
Er... HERK, I THINK CRYS AND I HAVE HAD OUR FILL.
WHAT? A MERE THREE HOURS?
THAT IS BUT A WARM-UP FOR THE PRINCE OF POWER!
BREET! WARNING. UNAUTHORIZED REACTIVATION OF BATTLE DROID 72-B. NO COMMAND AUTHORIZATION.
DANE, I THOUGHT THE DROID COULDN'T ACTIVATE AFTER A BATTLE SEQUENCE.
ARGGH!
IT SHOULDN'T.
MUST BE SOME SORT OF GLITCH, BUT --HERK?!
FZMMM
UHHNN!
OBOY... LOW LEVEL LASER...
SSSSSSS
THIS GUY'S TOTALLY OUT OF CONTROL.


I DON'T GET THIS.
VMMMM
THE VISION JUST *SUPERVISED* A SYSTEMS DIAGNOSTIC THIS MORNING...
...NOT LIKE HIM TO MISS SOMETHING LIKE *THIS*...!
SZZRIEKK
GUESS WE'LL HAVE TO...
...FIND OUT WHAT WENT *WRONG*...
...AT THE *POST MORTEM!*
SHRAKKT!

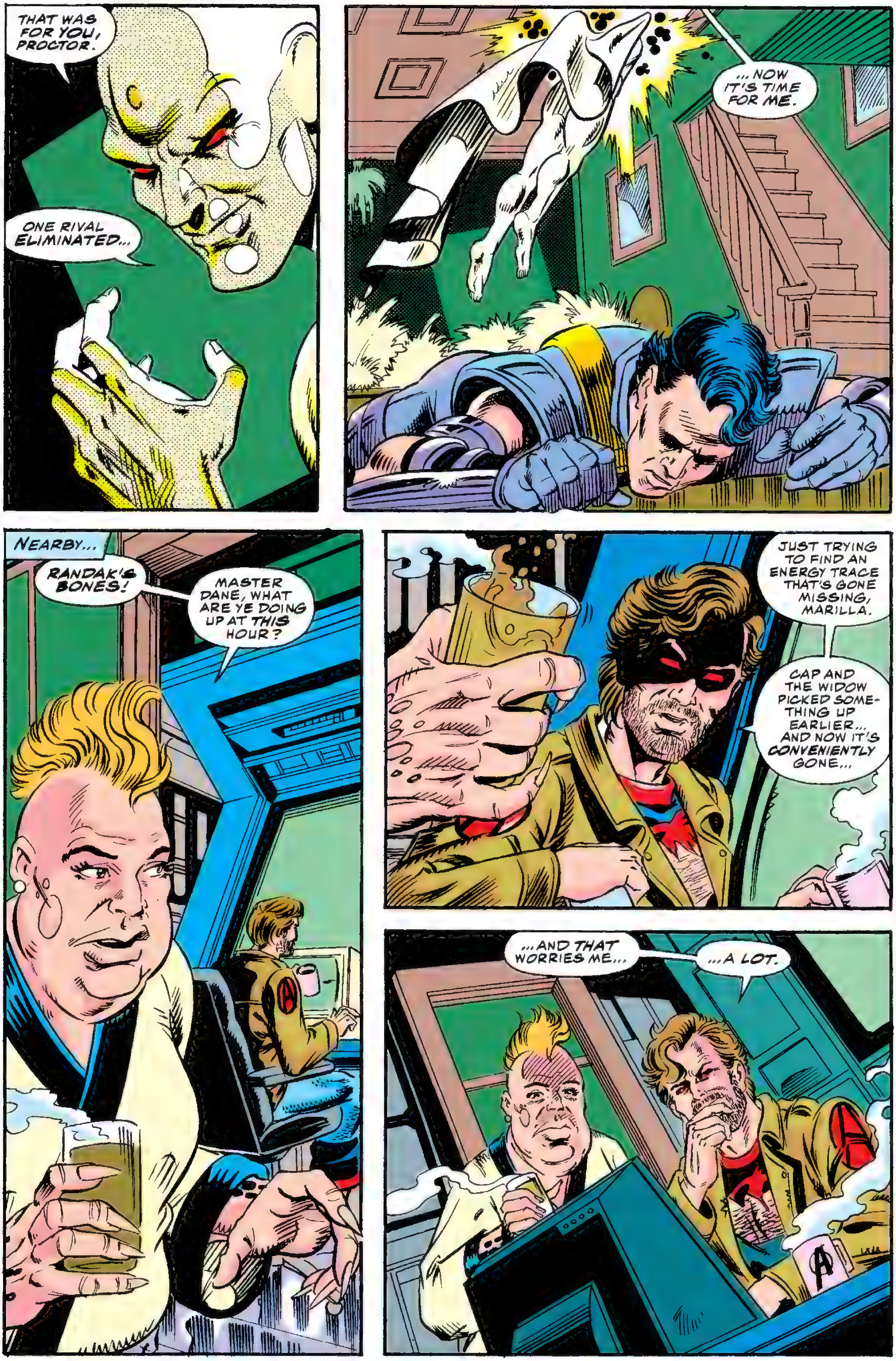

WELL, THERE GOES SIX WEEKS OF RE-DESIGN DOWN THE DRAIN.
I THINK THE VISH AND I ARE GOING TO HAVE A LITTLE CHAT ABOUT THIS.
DANE, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
NEVER BEEN BETTER.
YOU?
SAME.
CRYS, ABOUT... UM... LAST NIGHT, I THINK WE--
DANE?
I'M NOT INTERRUPTING ANYTHING...
...AM I?
SERSI?!

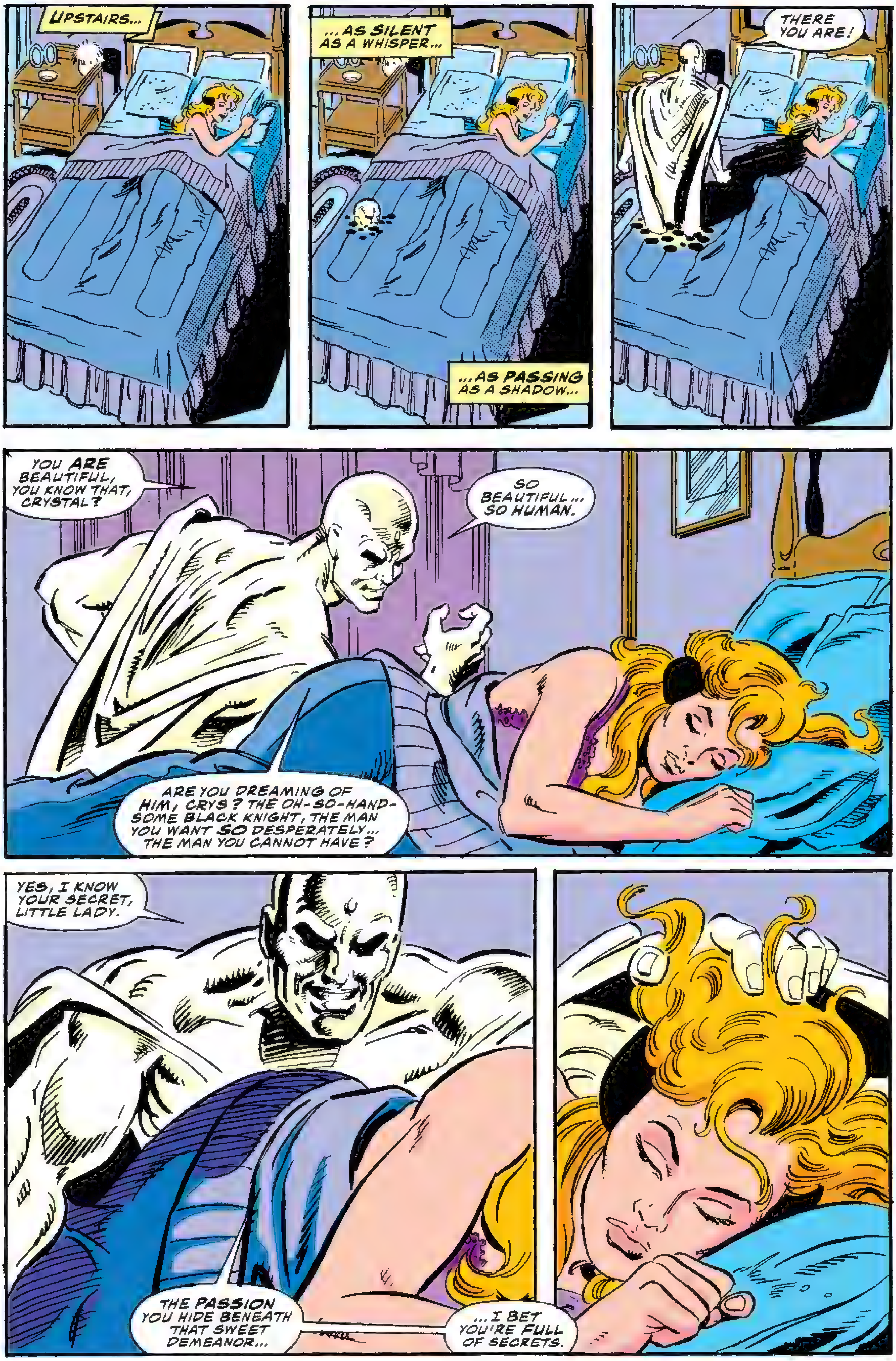

SEVERAL HOURS LATER...
OH, PROCTOR, PROCTOR, PROCTOR!
YOU WERE SLOPPY, MR. HIGH AND MIGHTY...
...I CAN'T CARRY OUT MY LITTLE MISSION FOR YOU WITH THIS ANNOYING ECHO TRACE HANGING AROUND.
TEK TEK TEK
THERE! THE PATTERN IS COMPLETELY HIDDEN.
AFTER TONIGHT--AFTER POOR, POOR PHILIP DIES--I OWE YOU AND YOUR PRECIOUS GATHERERS NOTHING, PROCTOR...
...I HAVE A NEW WORLD TO DISCOVER. A WORLD SO LIKE MY OLD ONE, AND YET SO DIFFERENT. I MEAN, BACK THERE I KILLED CAPTAIN AMERICA JUST FOR BEING SANCTIMONIOUS...
...AND I NEVER MET ANYONE QUITE AS ATTRACTIVE AS THE PRETTY LITTLE ELEMENTAL.
NO... I NEVER MET ANYONE LIKE CRYSTAL...
VISION...?
WHA--?!
WOW.
I DIDN'T THINK YOU COULD BE STARTLED.
I AM FULL OF SURPRISES, SWORDSMAN.
I WAS WONDERING IF YOU'D LIKE TO HELP ME GO THROUGH MORE OF MY OLD FILES... MAYBE SOMETHING WILL JOG MY MEMORIES OF MY TIME WITH THE GATHERERS.
PHILIP...
...I'D BE DELIGHTED.

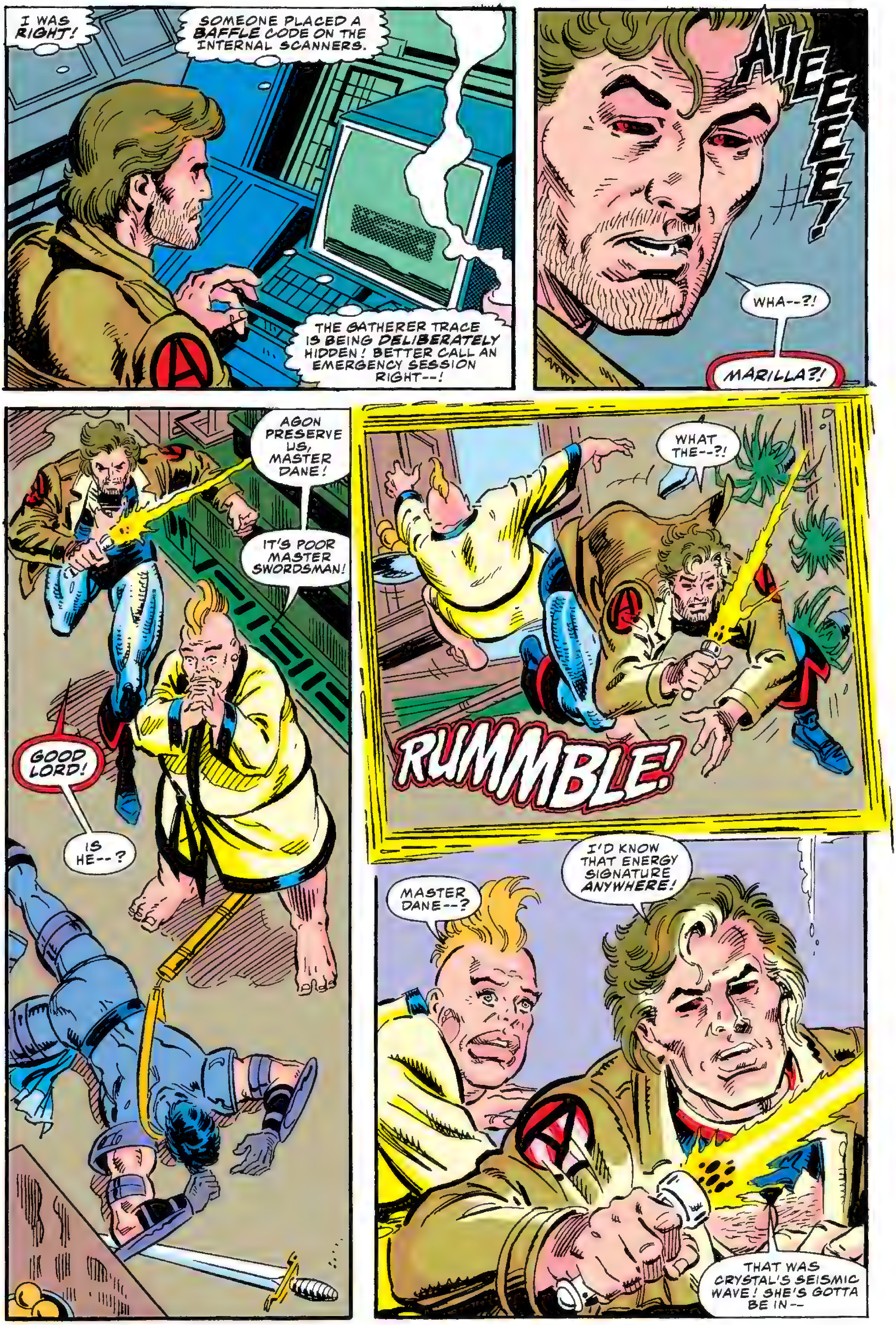

UPSTAIRS...
...THE NURSERY.
NOW, NOW, MARILLA, YE JUST BE LETTING YOUR MIND RUN AWAY FROM YE, YE ARE!
LOOK YE THERE. LITTLE LUNA ASLEEP ALL SAFE N' SOUND NOW, MAY AGON BLESS HER LITTLE HEART.
SHE LOOKS JUST LIKE HER MOTHER, MY SWEET LADY CRYS, DID AT HER AGE, SHE DOES!
BUT I CAN'T SHAKE THE FEELIN' THAT SOMETHING BAD BE BREWIN'. HANGIN' OVER ME HEART, THAT FEELIN' IS!
OH, WELL, P'RHAPS A CUP O' TEA WILL SOOTHE ME NERVES...
...AYE, A CUP O' TEA WITH SOME HELP FROM SOME FINE OLD ATILLIAN BRANDY.
LIFE'S FUNNY, VISION.
WHEN I WAS WITH THE GATHERERS, I THOUGHT YOU WERE THE VISION FROM MY WORLD, THE ONE WHO LEFT ME TO DIE...
...I WAS CONFUSED BY THE DIMENSIONAL TRANSIT, I GUESS I STILL AM.
BUT, NOW, WELL... VISION, I WANT YOU TO KNOW YOU'RE THE CLOSEST THING I HAVE TO A FRIEND HERE.

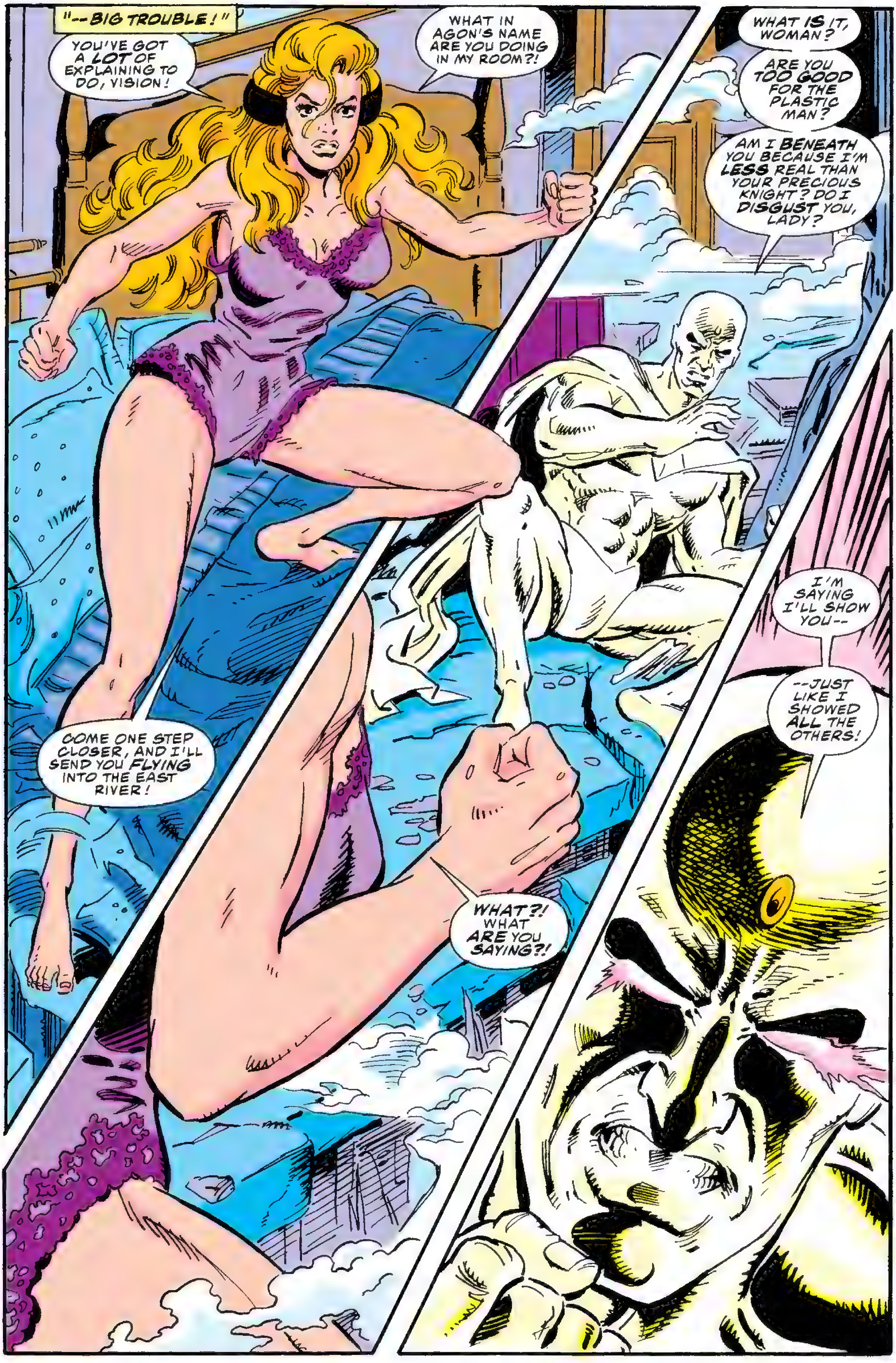

THAT'S SO SWEET...
...PHIL.
"PHIL"?
THAT DOESN'T SOUND LIKE YOU, VISION.
IT DOESN'T SOUND LIKE YOU AT ALL.
I CAN'T RESIST THIS, BUT...
...I HAVEN'T BEEN MYSELF LATELY!
HEY, HEY! DON'T LOOK SO FRIGHTENED, PHIL...
...I'M JUST LIKE YOU, A REFUGEE FROM ANOTHER TIMELINE. A GATHERER, LOST AND CONFUSED BY FATE AND THE HAND PROCTOR'S DEALT US.
WE SHOULD BE FRIENDS, PHIL.

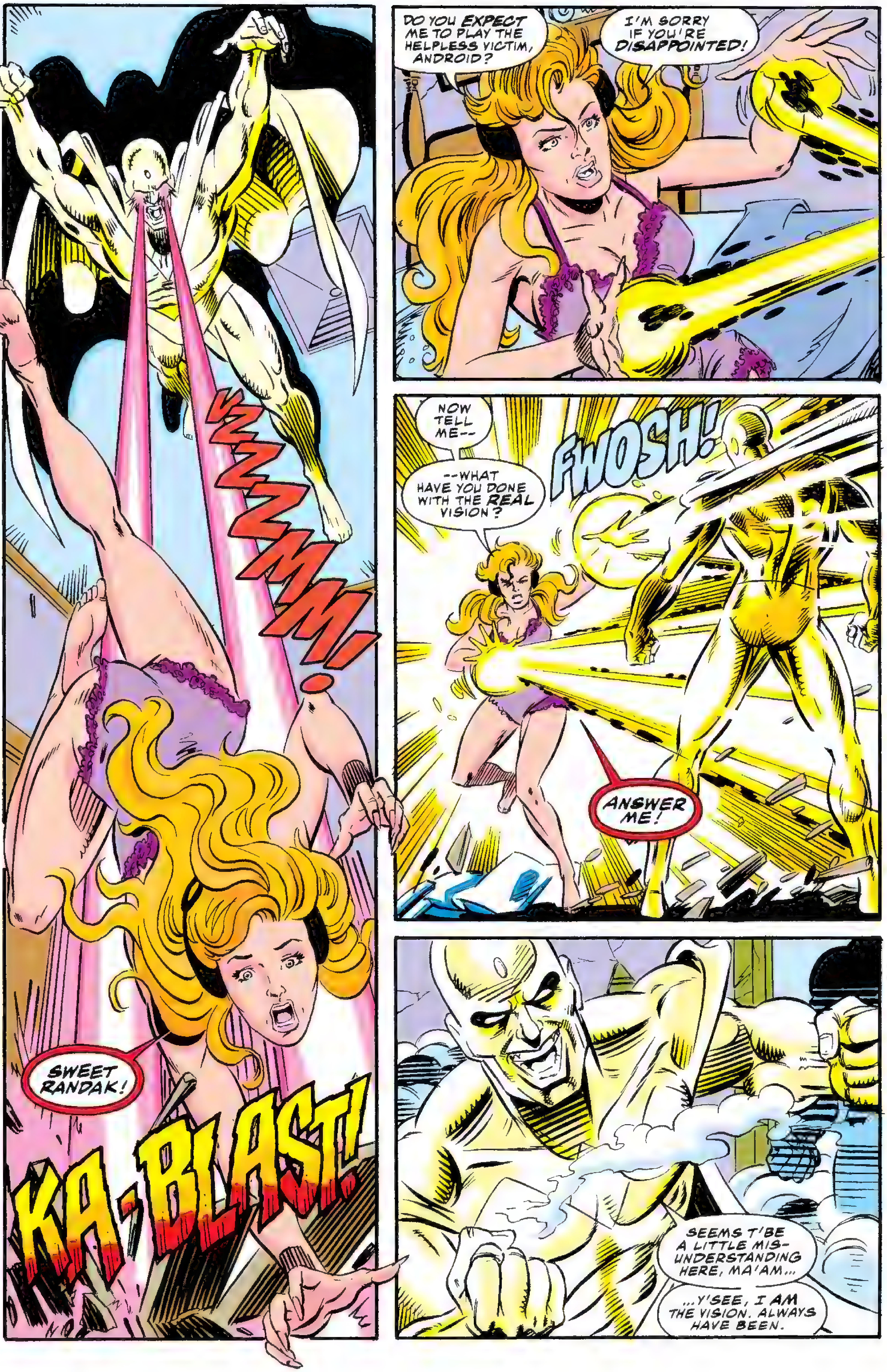
BUT...
... I JUST DON'T LIKE YOU VERY MUCH, PHIL.
SORRY... IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT... JUST A PERSONALITY THING.
VSSSH

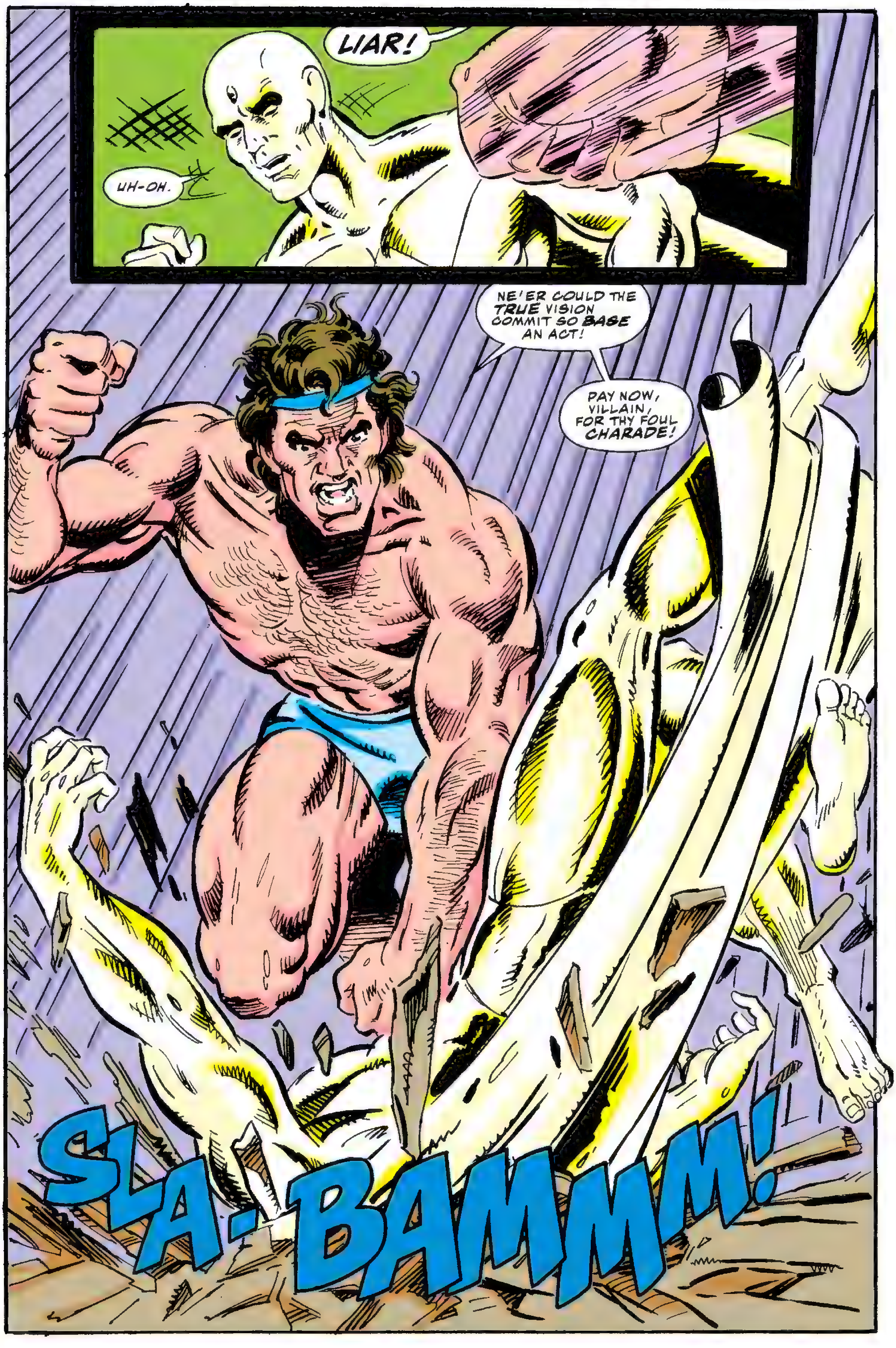

THAT WAS FOR YOU, PROCTOR.
ONE RIVAL ELIMINATED...
...NOW IT'S TIME FOR ME.
NEARBY...
RANDAK'S BONES!
MASTER DANE, WHAT ARE YE DOING UP AT THIS HOUR?
JUST TRYING TO FIND AN ENERGY TRACE THAT'S GONE MISSING, MARILLA.
CAP AND THE WIDOW PICKED SOMETHING UP EARLIER... AND NOW IT'S CONVENIENTLY GONE...
...AND THAT WORRIES ME...
...A LOT.

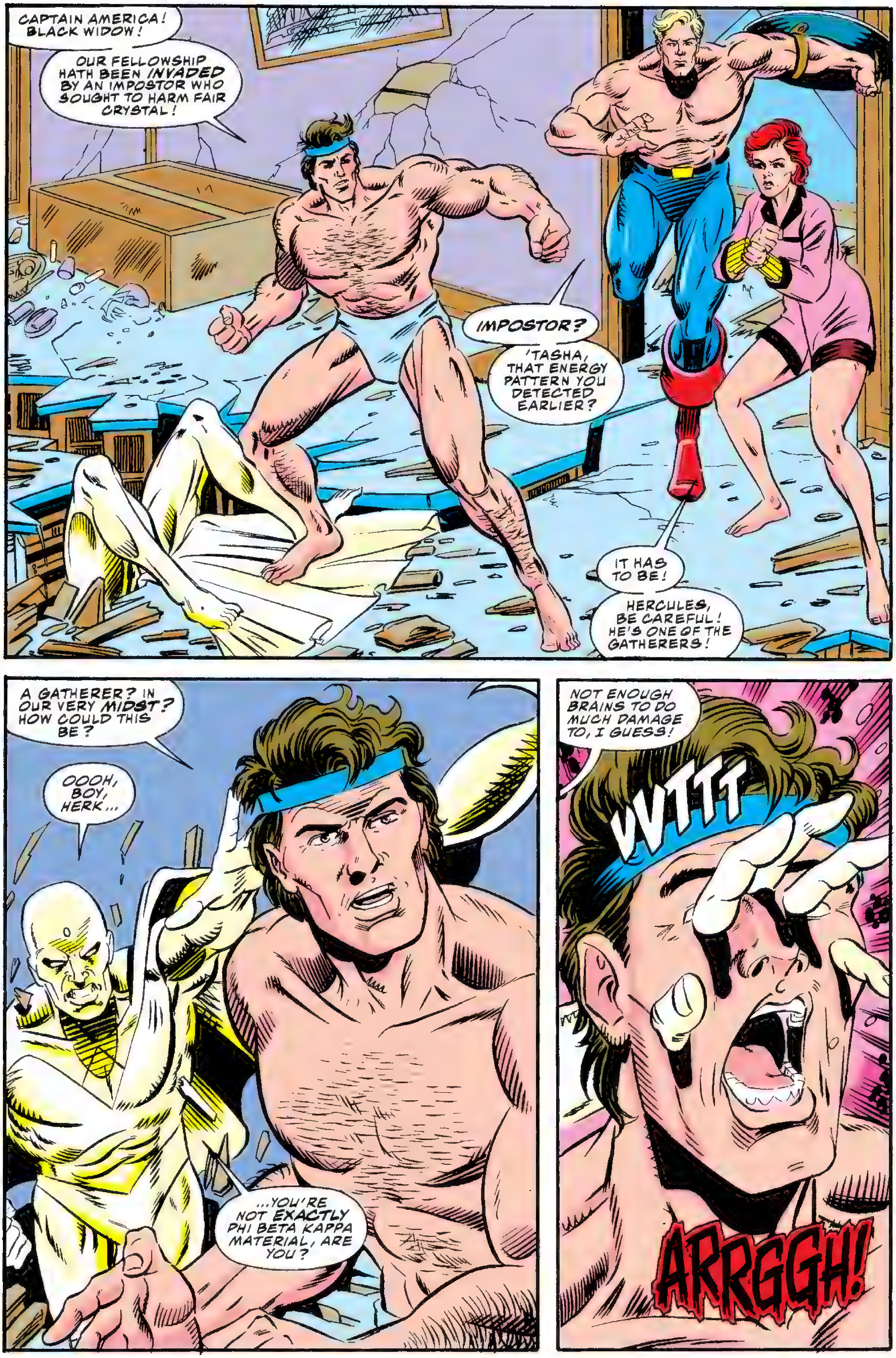

UPSTAIRS...
...AS SILENT AS A WHISPER...
...AS PASSING AS A SHADOW...
THERE YOU ARE!
YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL, YOU KNOW THAT, CRYSTAL?
SO BEAUTIFUL... SO HUMAN.
ARE YOU DREAMING OF HIM, CRYS? THE OH-SO-HANDSOME BLACK KNIGHT, THE MAN YOU WANT SO DESPERATELY... THE MAN YOU CANNOT HAVE?
YES, I KNOW YOUR SECRET, LITTLE LADY.
THE PASSION YOU HIDE BENEATH THAT SWEET DEMEANOR...
...I BET YOU'RE FULL OF SECRETS.

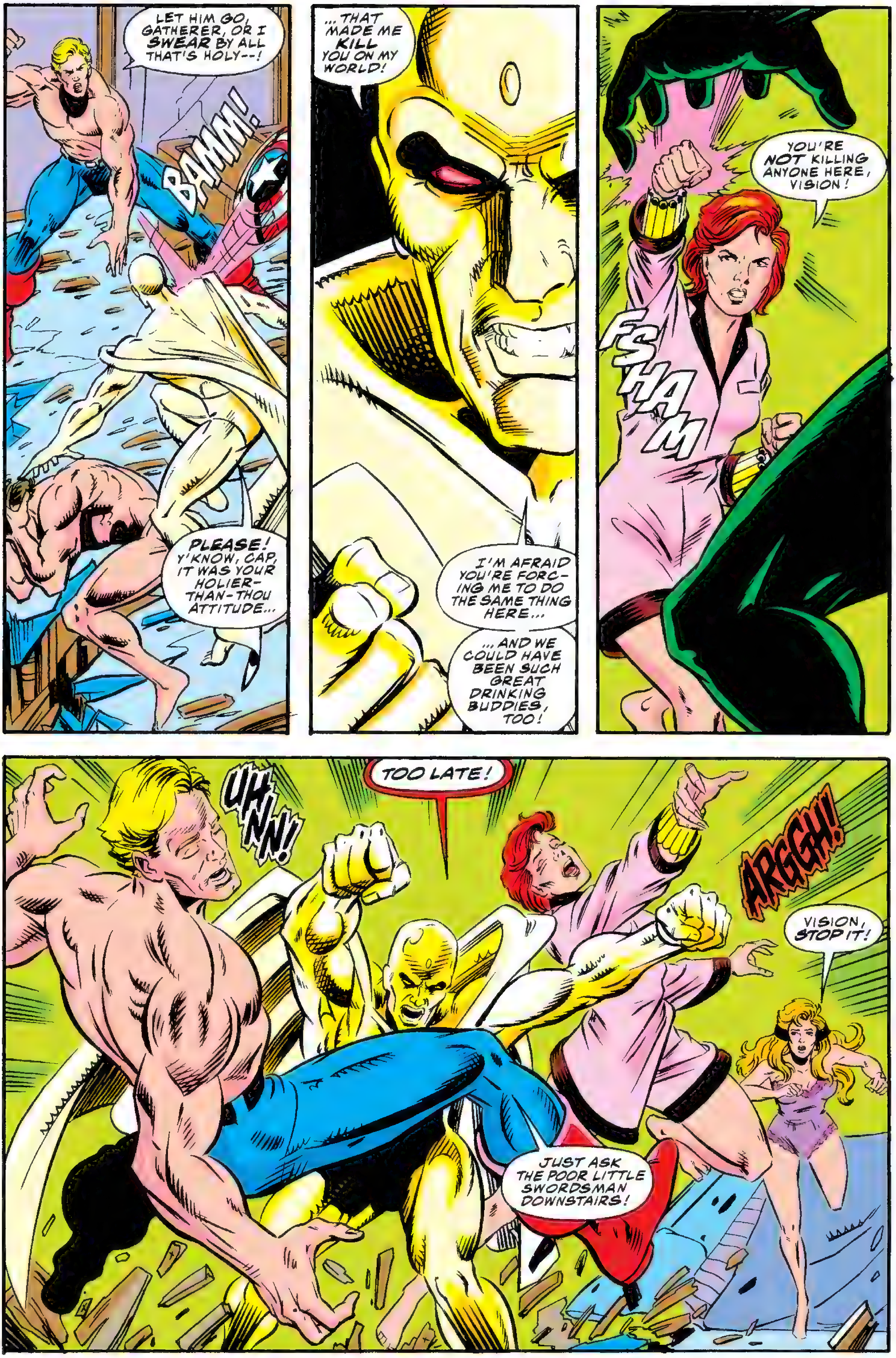

I WAS RIGHT!
SOMEONE PLACED A BAFFLE CODE ON THE INTERNAL SCANNERS.
THE GATHERER TRACE IS BEING DELIBERATELY HIDDEN! BETTER CALL AN EMERGENCY SESSION RIGHT--!
AIIEEEEE!
WHA--?!
MARILLA?!
AGON PRESERVE US, MASTER DANE!
IT'S POOR MASTER SWORDSMAN!
GOOD LORD!
IS HE--?
WHAT THE--?!
RUMMBLE!
MASTER DANE--?
I'D KNOW THAT ENERGY SIGNATURE ANYWHERE!
THAT WAS CRYSTAL'S SEISMIC WAVE! SHE'S GOTTA BE IN--


"--BIG TROUBLE!"
YOU'VE GOT A LOT OF EXPLAINING TO DO, VISION!
WHAT IN AGON'S NAME ARE YOU DOING IN MY ROOM?!
COME ONE STEP CLOSER, AND I'LL SEND YOU FLYING INTO THE EAST RIVER!
WHAT IS IT, WOMAN?
ARE YOU TOO GOOD FOR THE PLASTIC MAN?
AM I BENEATH YOU BECAUSE I'M LESS REAL THAN YOUR PRECIOUS KNIGHT? DO I DISGUST YOU, LADY?
WHAT?! WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?!
I'M SAYING I'LL SHOW YOU--
--JUST LIKE I SHOWED ALL THE OTHERS!

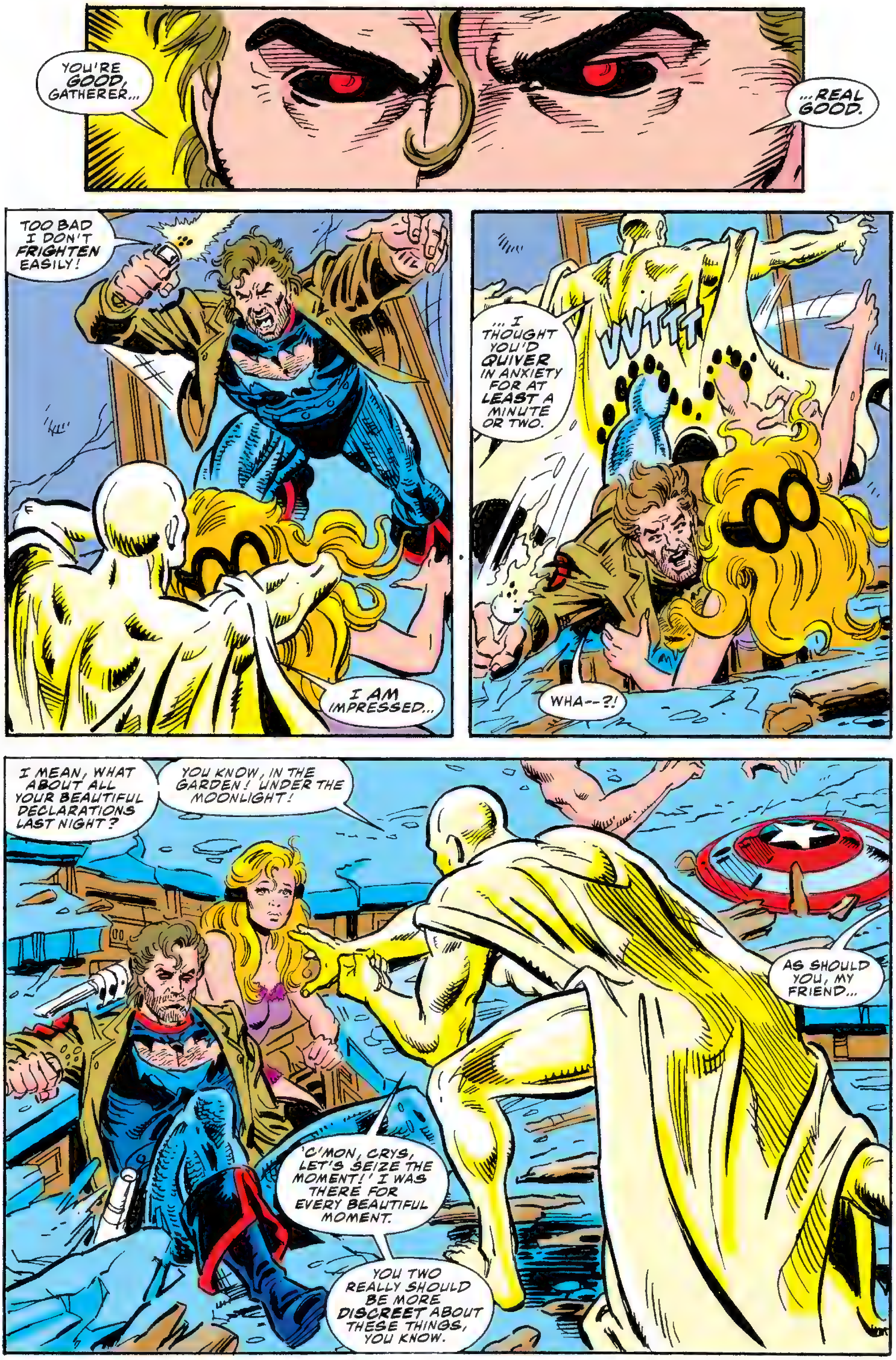

VZZZMMM!
SWEET RANDAK!
KA-BLAST!
DO YOU EXPECT ME TO PLAY THE HELPLESS VICTIM, ANDROID?
I'M SORRY IF YOU'RE DISAPPOINTED!
NOW TELL ME--
--WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH THE REAL VISION?
FWOSH!
ANSWER ME!
SEEMS T'BE A LITTLE MISUNDERSTANDING HERE, MA'AM...
...Y'SEE, I AM THE VISION. ALWAYS HAVE BEEN.

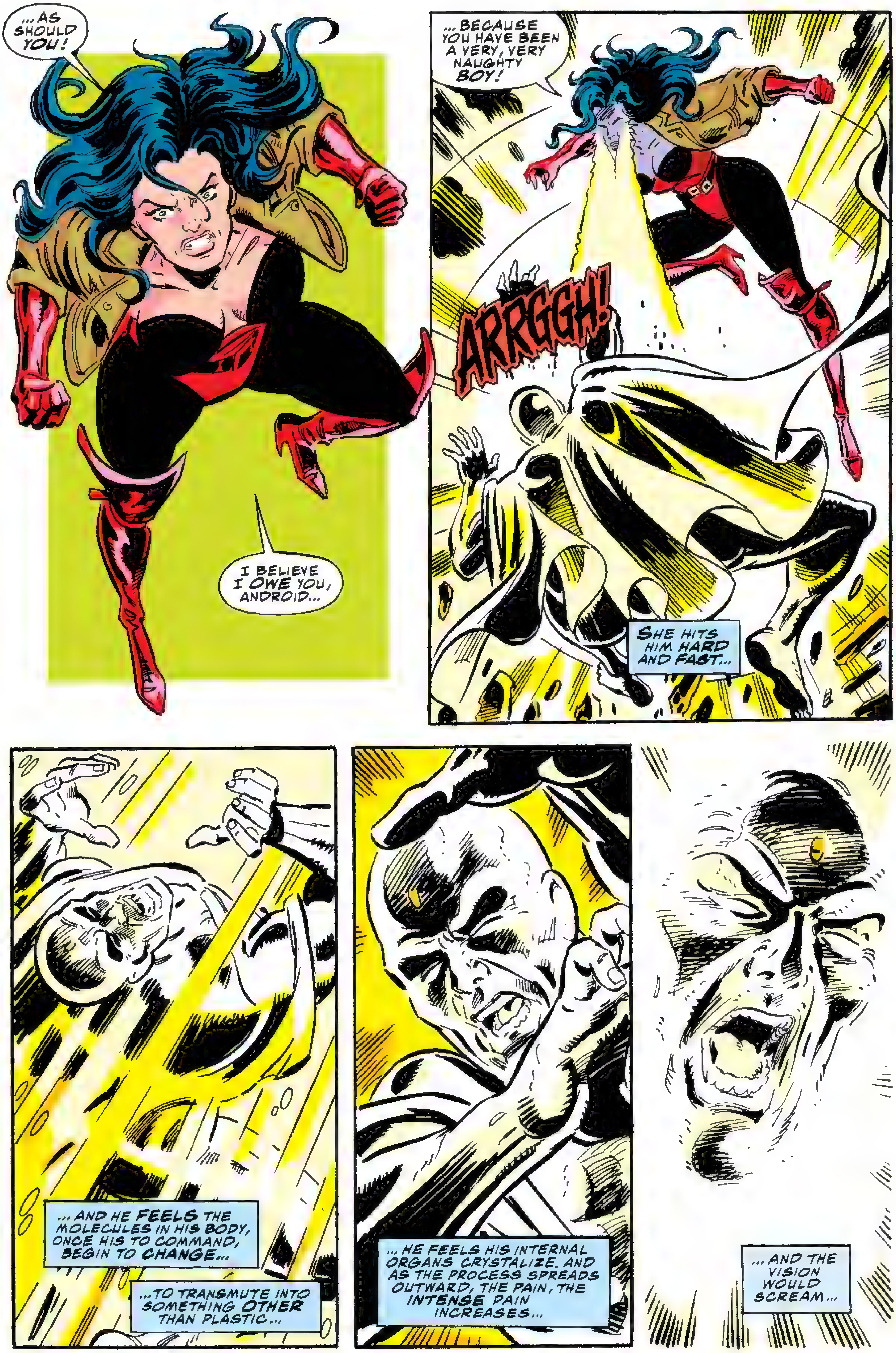

LIAR!
UH-OH.
NE'ER COULD THE TRUE VISION COMMIT SO BASE AN ACT!
PAY NOW, VILLAIN, FOR THY FOUL CHARADE!
SLA-BAMMM!

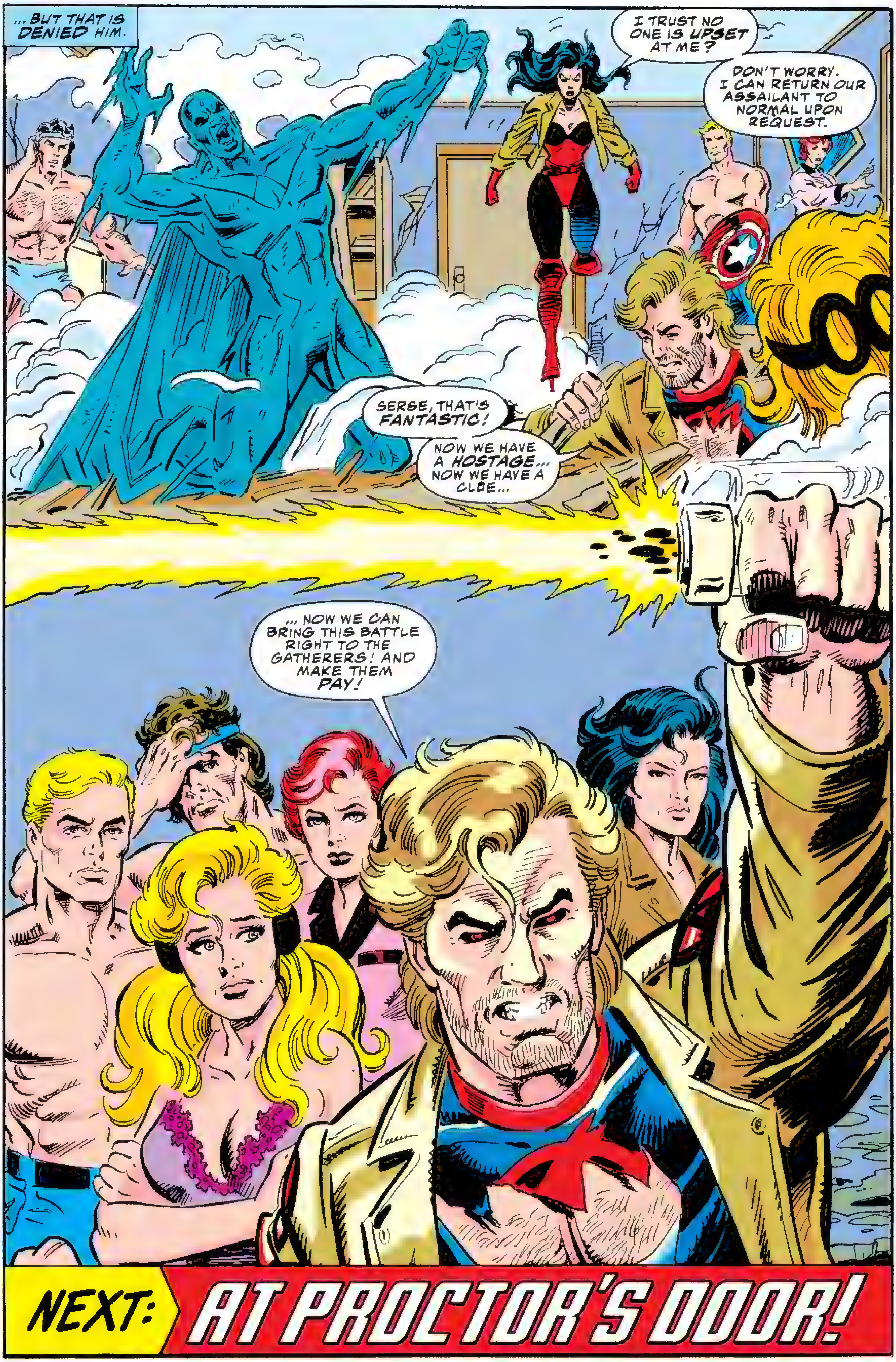

CAPTAIN AMERICA! BLACK WIDOW!
OUR FELLOWSHIP HATH BEEN *INVADED* BY AN IMPOSTOR WHO SOUGHT TO HARM FAIR CRYSTAL!
IMPOSTOR?
'TASHA, THAT ENERGY PATTERN YOU DETECTED EARLIER?
IT HAS TO BE!
HERCULES, BE CAREFUL! HE'S ONE OF THE GATHERERS!
A GATHERER? IN OUR VERY *MIDST?* HOW COULD THIS BE?
OOOH, BOY, HERK...
...YOU'RE NOT *EXACTLY* PHI BETA KAPPA MATERIAL, ARE YOU?
NOT ENOUGH BRAINS TO DO MUCH DAMAGE TO, I GUESS!
VVTTT
ARRGGH!

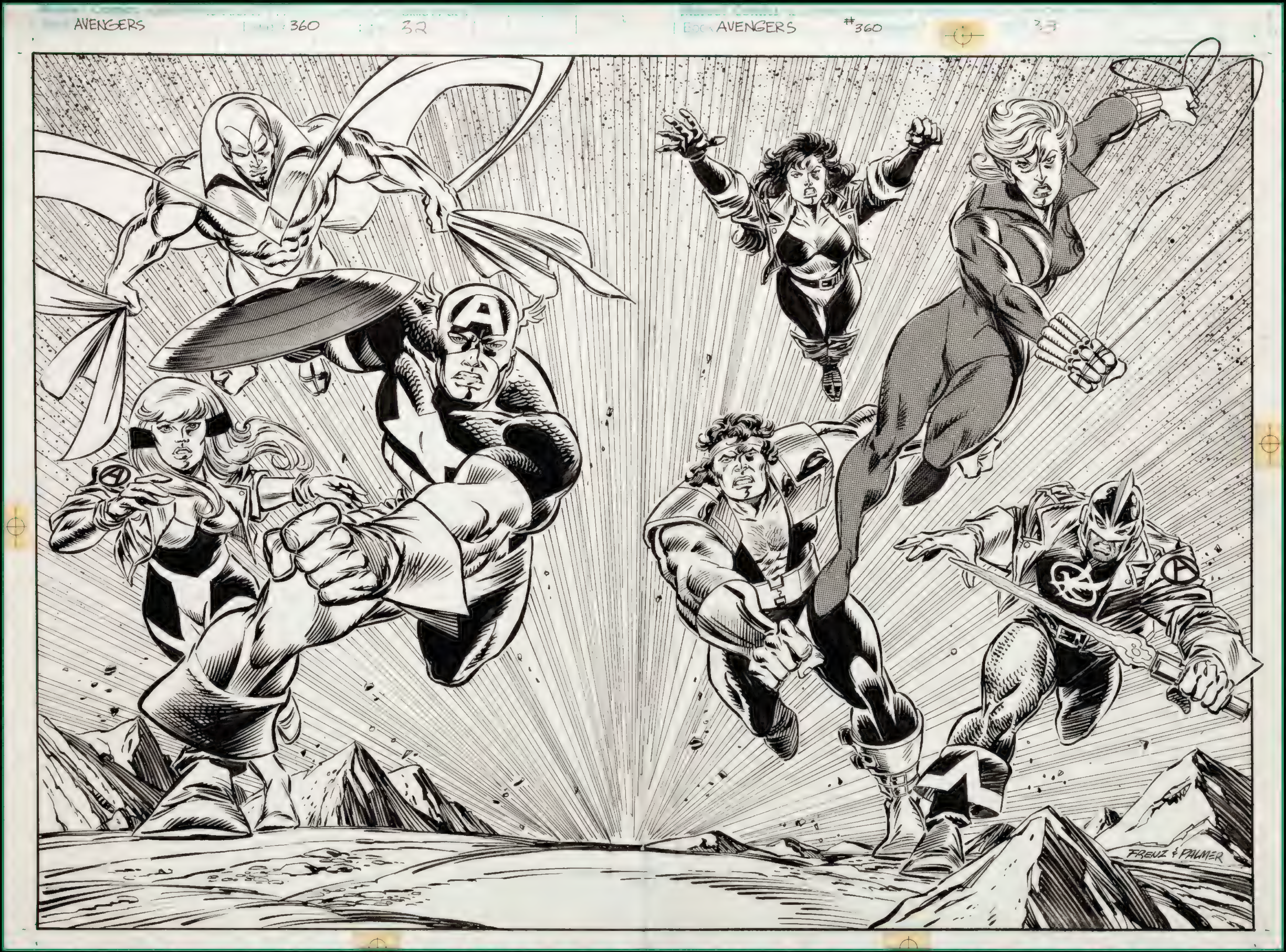

LET HIM GO, GATHERER, OR I **SWEAR** BY ALL THAT'S HOLY--!
BAMM!
PLEASE! Y'KNOW, CAP, IT WAS YOUR HOLIER-THAN-THOU ATTITUDE...
...THAT MADE ME **KILL** YOU ON MY WORLD!
I'M AFRAID YOU'RE FORCING ME TO DO THE SAME THING HERE...
...AND WE COULD HAVE BEEN SUCH GREAT DRINKING BUDDIES, TOO!
YOU'RE **NOT** KILLING ANYONE HERE, VISION!
FSHAM
UHNN!
TOO LATE!
ARGGH!
VISION, **STOP IT!**
JUST ASK THE POOR LITTLE SWORDSMAN DOWNSTAIRS!

WHO ARE YOU TO TELL ME WHAT TO DO, SWEETHEART?
SEEMS T'ME, I'M IN CHARGE HERE.
WHO ARE YOU?
WHERE IS OUR VISION?
OH, HE'S THE GUEST OF A MAN WHO HATES YOU ALL VERY, VERY MUCH.
WHO, VISION?
LET CRYSTAL GO AND TELL US WHO.
NOW WHY WOULD I DO THAT, KNIGHT?
MAKE ONE STEP MORE AND I'LL SOLIDIFY MY FINGER OH-SO-SLIGHTLY AND STOP ALL BLOOD FLOW INTO SWEET CRYSTAL'S LOVELY BRAIN.


YOU'RE GOOD, GATHERER...
...REAL GOOD.
TOO BAD I DON'T FRIGHTEN EASILY!
I AM IMPRESSED...
... I THOUGHT YOU'D QUIVER IN ANXIETY FOR AT LEAST A MINUTE OR TWO.
VVTTT
WHA--?!
I MEAN, WHAT ABOUT ALL YOUR BEAUTIFUL DECLARATIONS LAST NIGHT?
YOU KNOW, IN THE GARDEN! UNDER THE MOONLIGHT!
AS SHOULD YOU, MY FRIEND...
'C'MON, CRYS, LET'S SEIZE THE MOMENT!' I WAS THERE FOR EVERY BEAUTIFUL MOMENT.
YOU TWO REALLY SHOULD BE MORE DISCREET ABOUT THESE THINGS, YOU KNOW.


...AS SHOULD YOU!
I BELIEVE I OWE YOU, ANDROID...
...BECAUSE YOU HAVE BEEN A VERY, VERY NAUGHTY BOY!
ARRGGH!
SHE HITS HIM HARD AND FAST...
...AND HE FEELS THE MOLECULES IN HIS BODY, ONCE HIS TO COMMAND, BEGIN TO CHANGE...
...TO TRANSMUTE INTO SOMETHING OTHER THAN PLASTIC...
...HE FEELS HIS INTERNAL ORGANS CRYSTALIZE, AND AS THE PROCESS SPREADS OUTWARD, THE PAIN, THE INTENSE PAIN INCREASES...
...AND THE VISION WOULD SCREAM...


...BUT THAT IS DENIED HIM.
I TRUST NO ONE IS UPSET AT ME?
DON'T WORRY. I CAN RETURN OUR ASSAILANT TO NORMAL UPON REQUEST.
SERSE, THAT'S FANTASTIC!
NOW WE HAVE A HOSTAGE... NOW WE HAVE A CLUE...
...NOW WE CAN BRING THIS BATTLE RIGHT TO THE GATHERERS! AND MAKE THEM PAY!
NEXT: AT PROCTOR'S DOOR!


AVENGERS
360
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AVENGERS
#360
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FRENZ & PALMER

AVENGERS #360, PAGES 29-30 ART BY RON FRENZ & TOM PALMER

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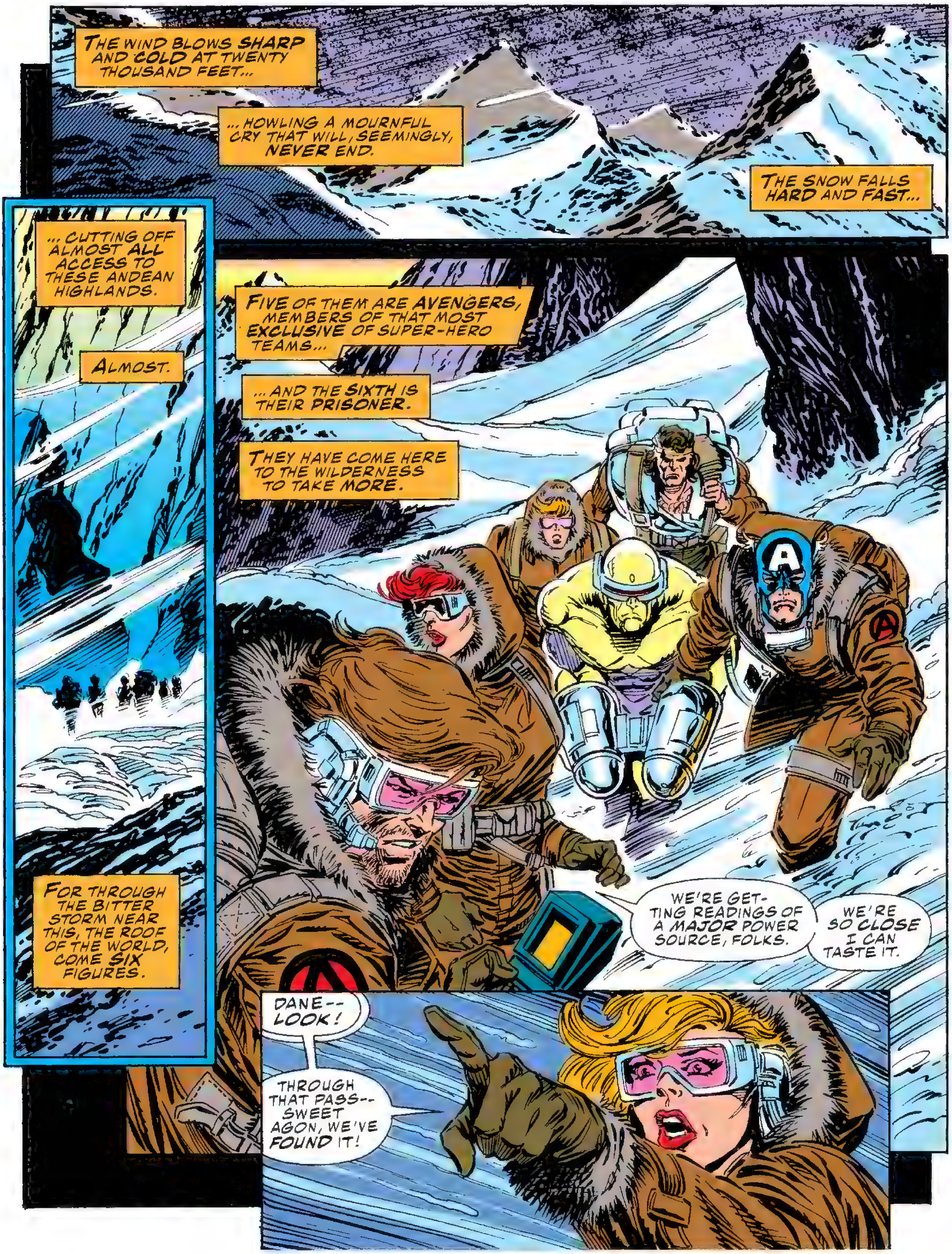
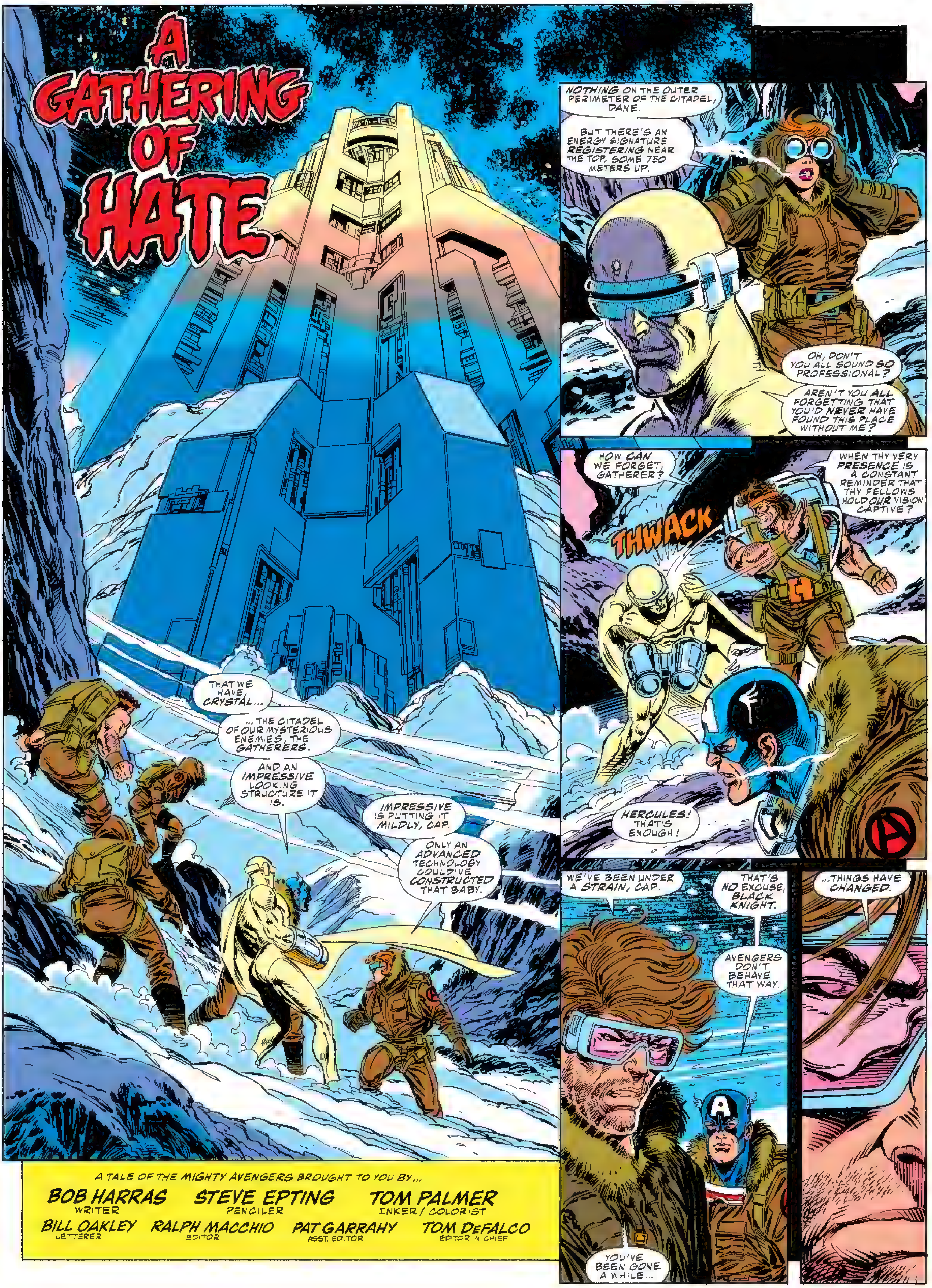
MARVEL COMICS
363
JUN
CONTINUING THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF THE
AVENGERS
DISSENSION

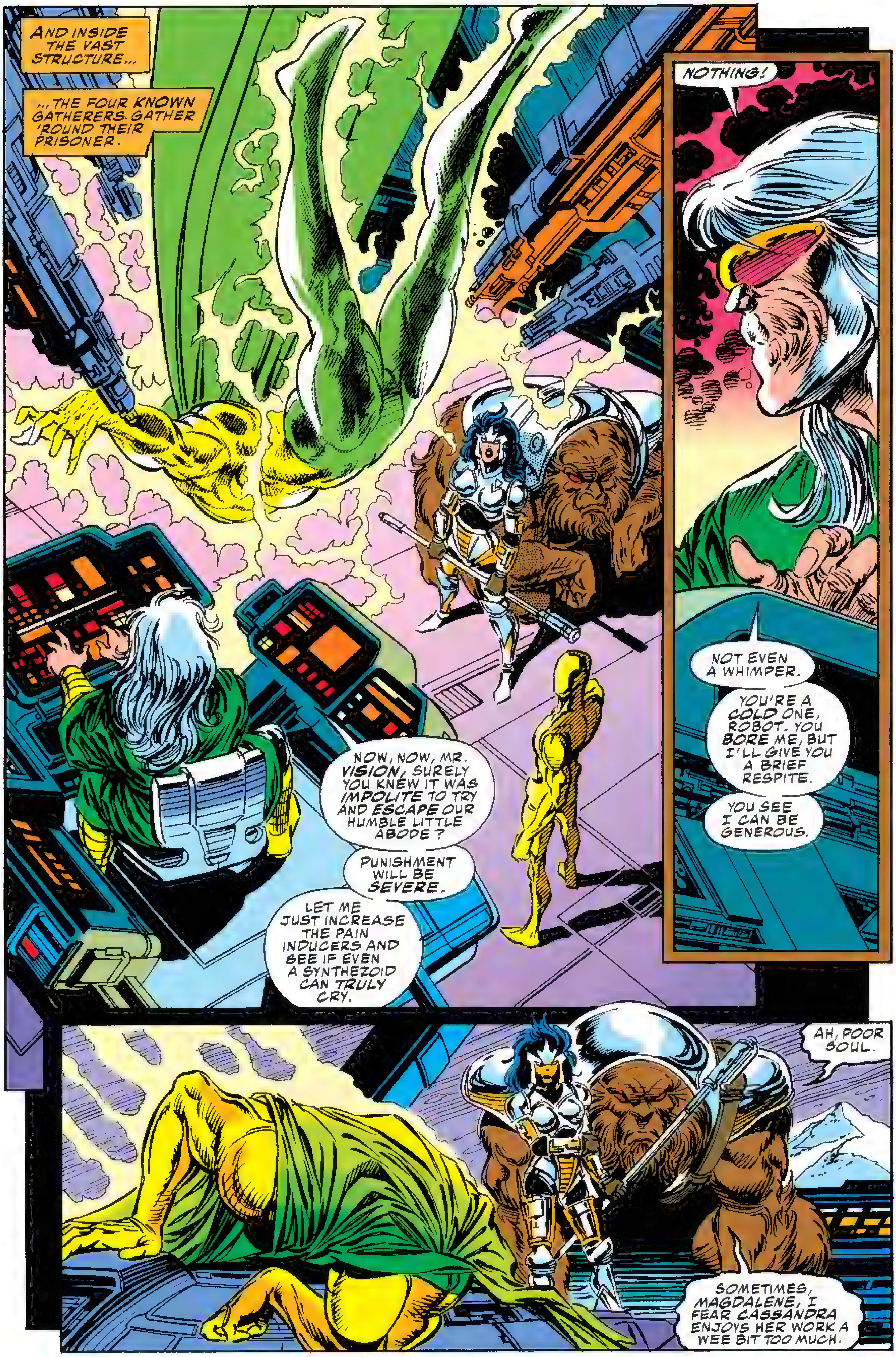
TO COMBAT THOSE THREATS WHICH NO SINGLE HERO CAN STAND AGAINST, EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES HAVE FORGED A COVENANT TO UNITE IN BATTLE FOR THE PROTECTION OF ALL MANKIND! STAN LEE PRESENTS . . . THE MIGHTY AVENGERS!

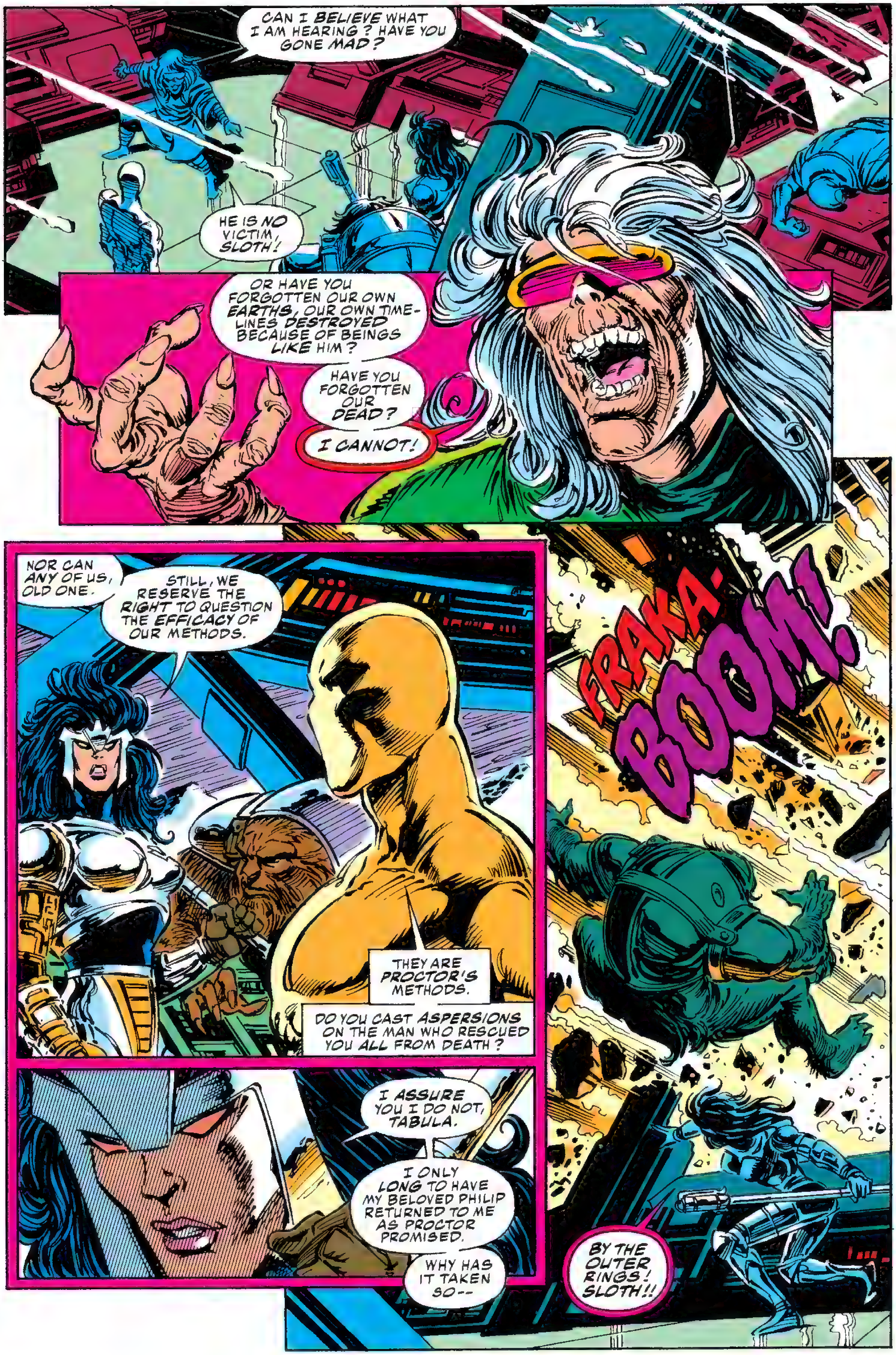

THE WIND BLOWS SHARP AND COLD AT TWENTY THOUSAND FEET...
...HOWLING A MOURNFUL CRY THAT WILL, SEEMINGLY, NEVER END.
THE SNOW FALLS HARD AND FAST...
...CUTTING OFF ALMOST ALL ACCESS TO THESE ANDEAN HIGHLANDS.
ALMOST.
FOR THROUGH THE BITTER STORM NEAR THIS, THE ROOF OF THE WORLD, COME SIX FIGURES.
FIVE OF THEM ARE AVENGERS, MEMBERS OF THAT MOST EXCLUSIVE OF SUPER-HERO TEAMS...
...AND THE SIXTH IS THEIR PRISONER.
THEY HAVE COME HERE TO THE WILDERNESS TO TAKE MORE.
WE'RE GETTING READINGS OF A MAJOR POWER SOURCE, FOLKS.
WE'RE SO CLOSE I CAN TASTE IT.
DANE-- LOOK!
THROUGH THAT PASS-- SWEET AGON, WE'VE FOUND IT!

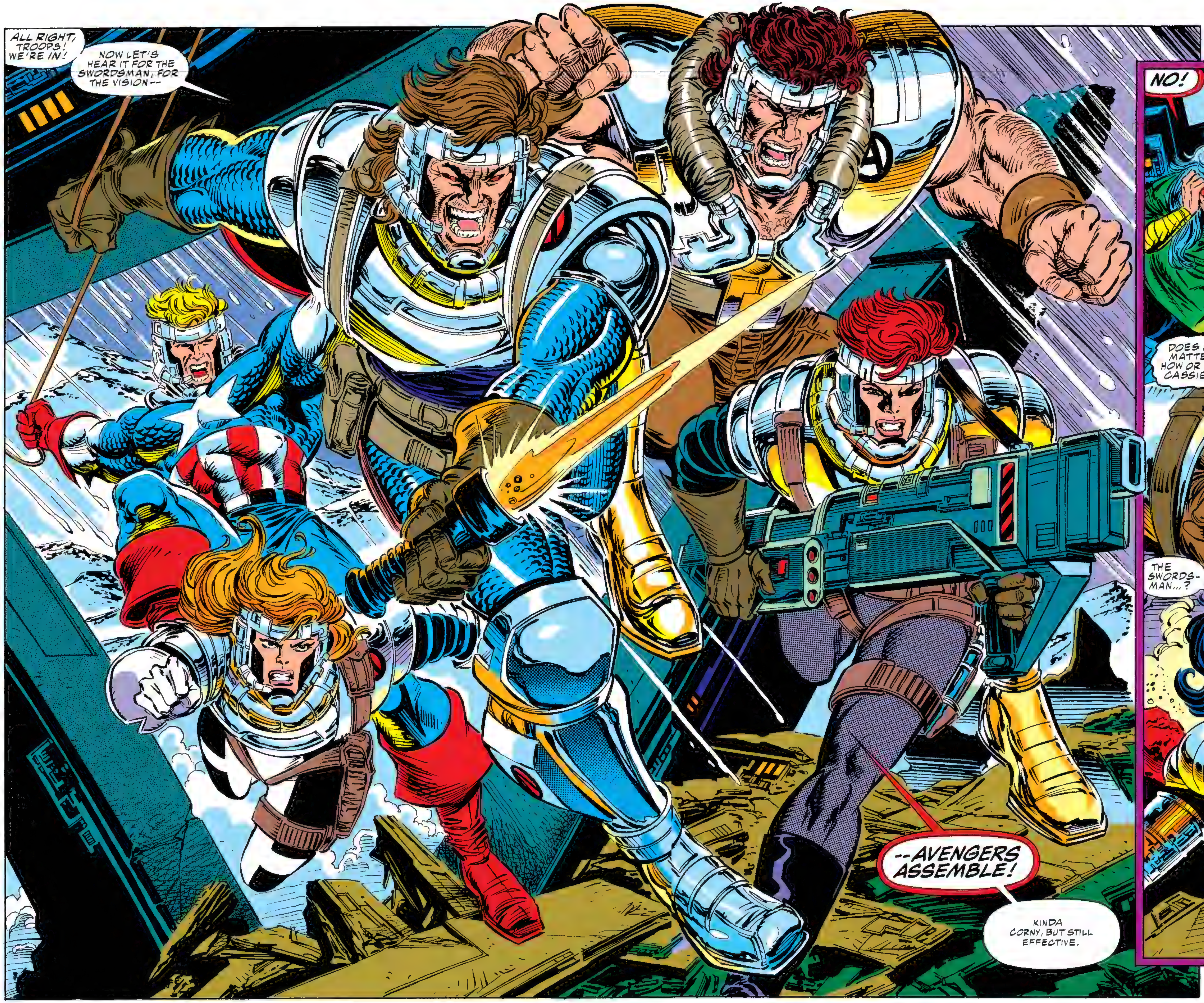
A GATHERING OF HATE

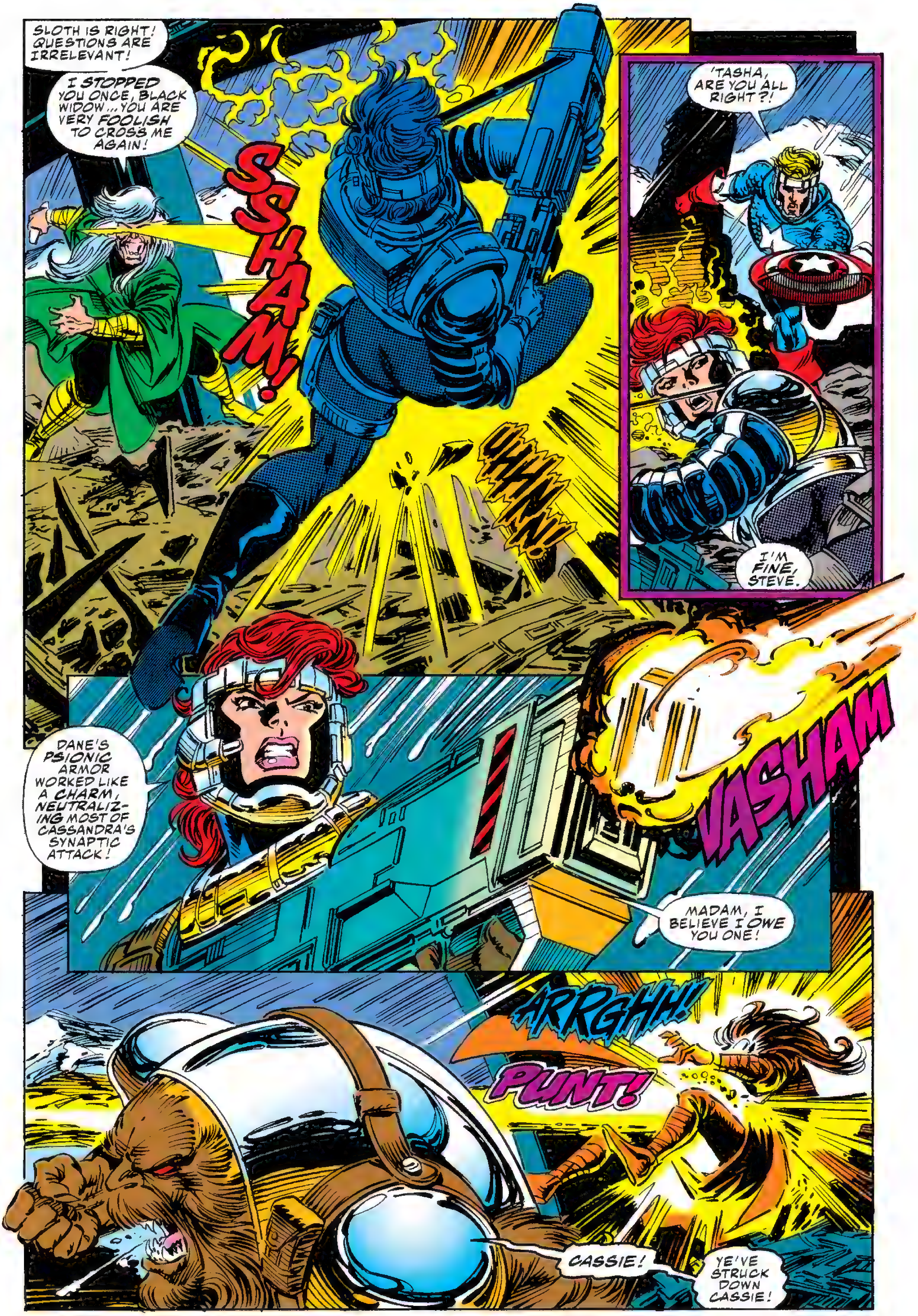

A GATHERING OF HATE
THAT WE HAVE, CRYSTAL...
...THE CITADEL OF OUR MYSTERIOUS ENEMIES, THE GATHERERS.
AND AN IMPRESSIVE LOOKING STRUCTURE IT IS.
IMPRESSIVE IS PUTTING IT MILDLY, CAP.
ONLY AN ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY COULD'VE CONSTRUCTED THAT BABY.
NOTHING ON THE OUTER PERIMETER OF THE CITADEL, DANE.
BUT THERE'S AN ENERGY SIGNATURE REGISTERING NEAR THE TOP, SOME 750 METERS UP.
OH, DON'T YOU ALL SOUND SO PROFESSIONAL?
AREN'T YOU ALL FORGETTING THAT YOU'D NEVER HAVE FOUND THIS PLACE WITHOUT ME?
HOW CAN WE FORGET, GATHERER?
WHEN THY VERY PRESENCE IS A CONSTANT REMINDER THAT THY FELLOWS HOLD OUR VISION CAPTIVE?
THWACK
HERCULES! THAT'S ENOUGH!
WE'VE BEEN UNDER A STRAIN, CAP.
THAT'S NO EXCUSE, BLACK KNIGHT.
AVENGERS DON'T BEHAVE THAT WAY.
YOU'VE BEEN GONE A WHILE...
...THINGS HAVE CHANGED.

A TALE OF THE MIGHTY AVENGERS BROUGHT TO YOU BY...
BOB HARRAS WRITER
STEVE EPTING PENCILER
TOM PALMER INKER / COLORIST
BILL OAKLEY LETTERER
RALPH MACCHIO EDITOR
PAT GARRAHY ASST. EDITOR
TOM DeFALCO EDITOR IN CHIEF

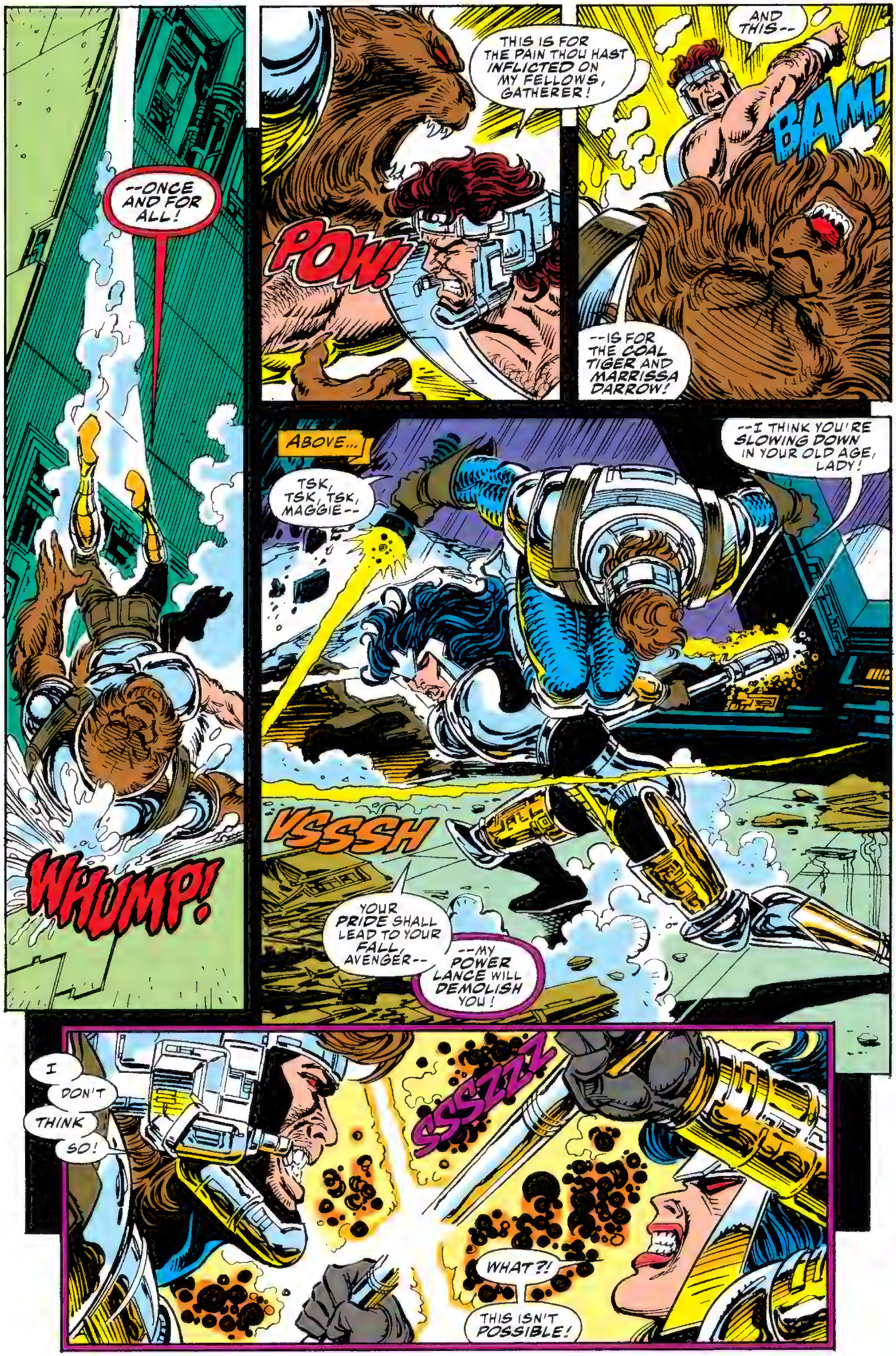

AND INSIDE THE VAST STRUCTURE...
...THE FOUR KNOWN GATHERERS GATHER 'ROUND THEIR PRISONER.
NOTHING!
NOT EVEN A WHIMPER.
YOU'RE A COLD ONE, ROBOT. YOU BORE ME, BUT I'LL GIVE YOU A BRIEF RESPITE.
YOU SEE I CAN BE GENEROUS.
NOW, NOW, MR. VISION, SURELY YOU KNEW IT WAS IMPOLITE TO TRY AND ESCAPE OUR HUMBLE LITTLE ABODE?
PUNISHMENT WILL BE SEVERE.
LET ME JUST INCREASE THE PAIN INDUCERS AND SEE IF EVEN A SYNTHEZOID CAN TRULY CRY.
AH, POOR SOUL.
SOMETIMES, MAGDALENE, I FEAR CASSANDRA ENJOYS HER WORK A WEE BIT TOO MUCH.

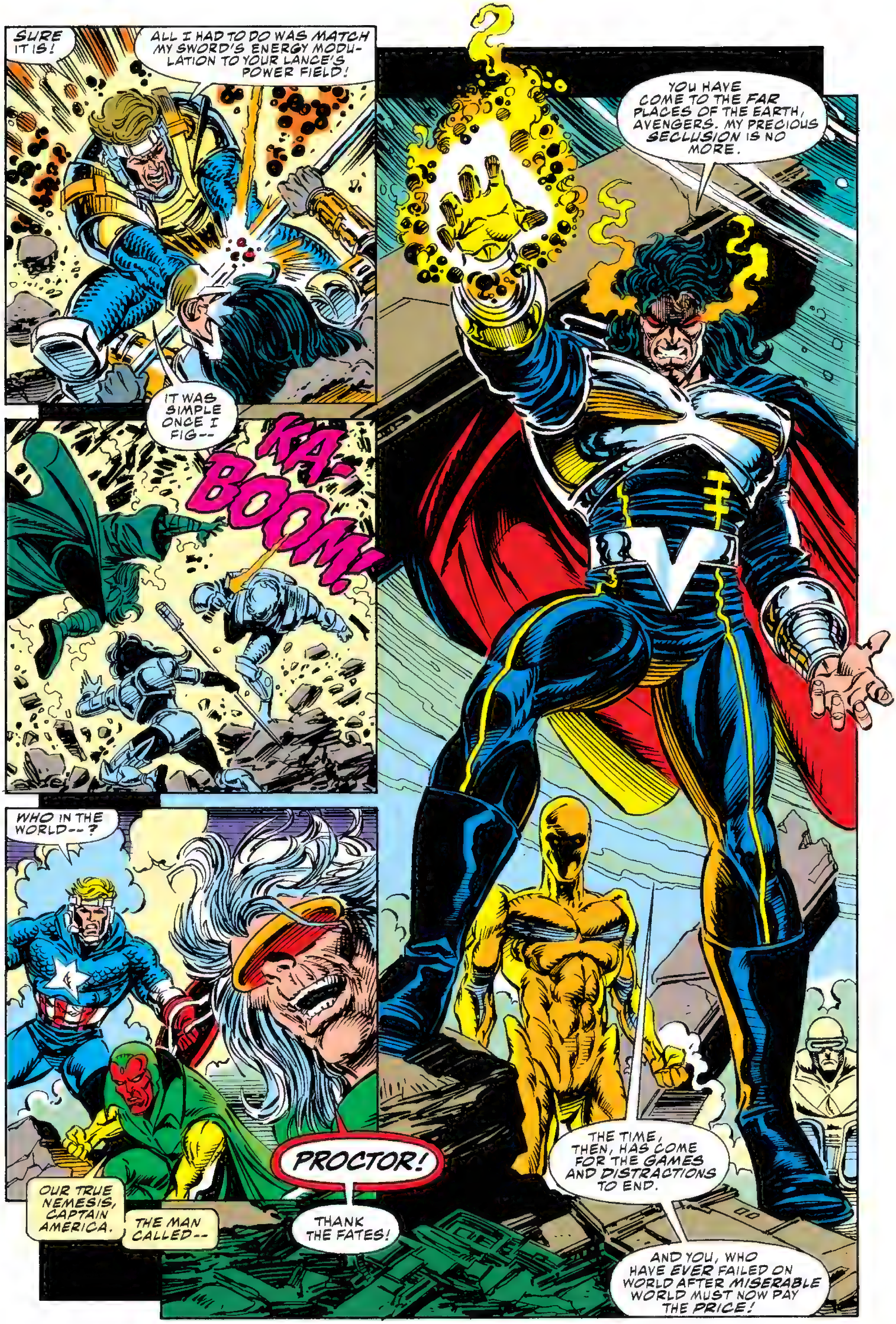

CAN I BELIEVE WHAT I AM HEARING? HAVE YOU GONE MAD?
HE IS NO VICTIM, SLOTH!
OR HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN OUR OWN EARTHS, OUR OWN TIMELINES DESTROYED BECAUSE OF BEINGS LIKE HIM?
HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN OUR DEAD?
I CANNOT!
NOR CAN ANY OF US, OLD ONE.
STILL, WE RESERVE THE RIGHT TO QUESTION THE EFFICACY OF OUR METHODS.
THEY ARE PROCTOR'S METHODS.
DO YOU CAST ASPERSIONS ON THE MAN WHO RESCUED YOU ALL FROM DEATH?
I ASSURE YOU I DO NOT, TABULA.
I ONLY LONG TO HAVE MY BELOVED PHILIP RETURNED TO ME AS PROCTOR PROMISED.
WHY HAS IT TAKEN SO--
FRAKA-BOOM!
BY THE OUTER RINGS! SLOTH!!

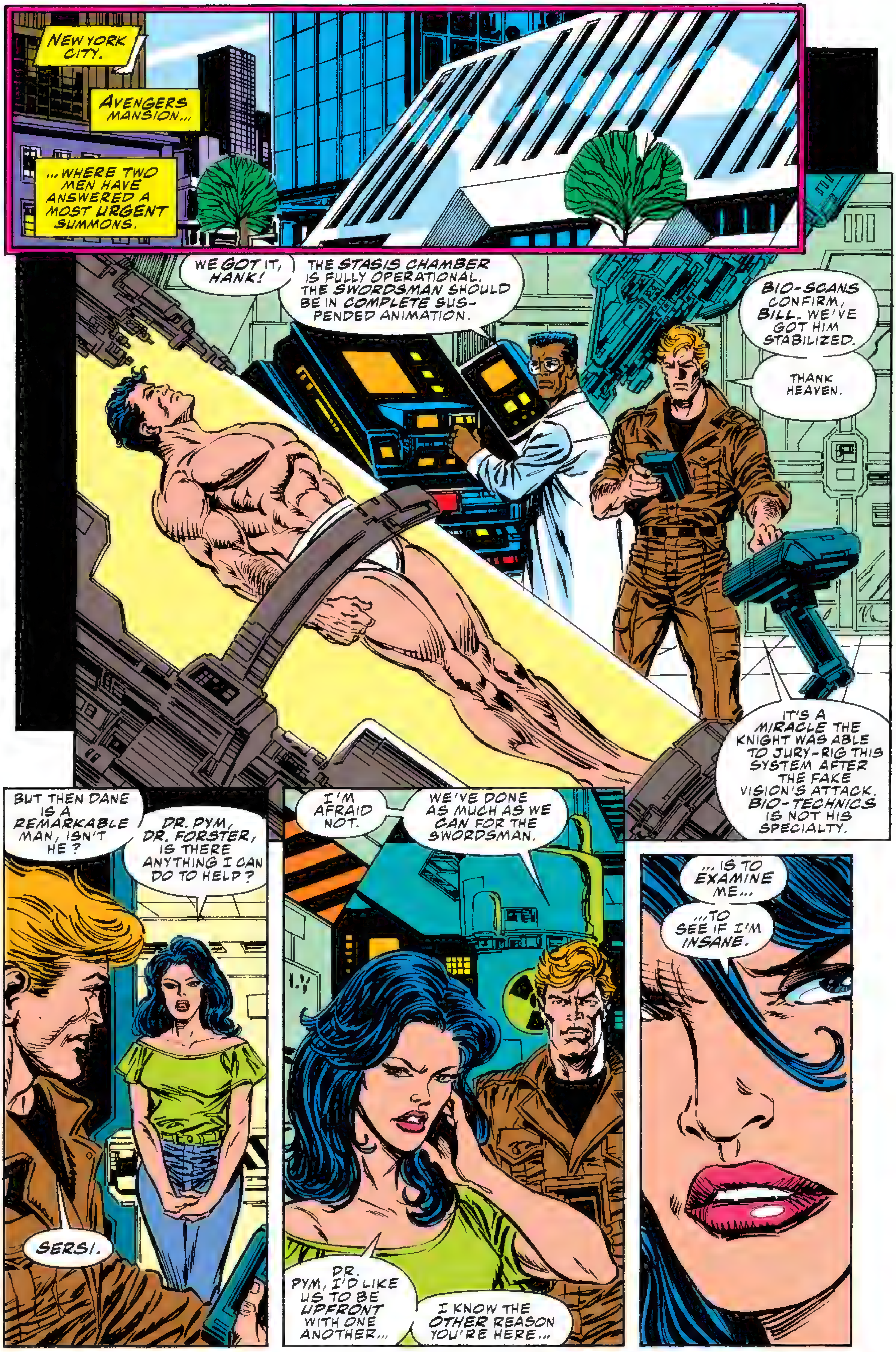

ALL RIGHT, TROOPS! WE'RE IN!
NOW LET'S HEAR IT FOR THE SWORDSMAN, FOR THE VISION--
--AVENGERS ASSEMBLE!
KINDA CORNY, BUT STILL EFFECTIVE.
NO!
THIS CAN'T BE! HOW COULD THEY HAVE FOUND US?!
DOES IT MATTER HOW OR WHY, CASSIE?
THEY ARE UNDENIABLY HERE.
THE SWORDSMAN...?
WHY DO THEY MENTION PHILIP?

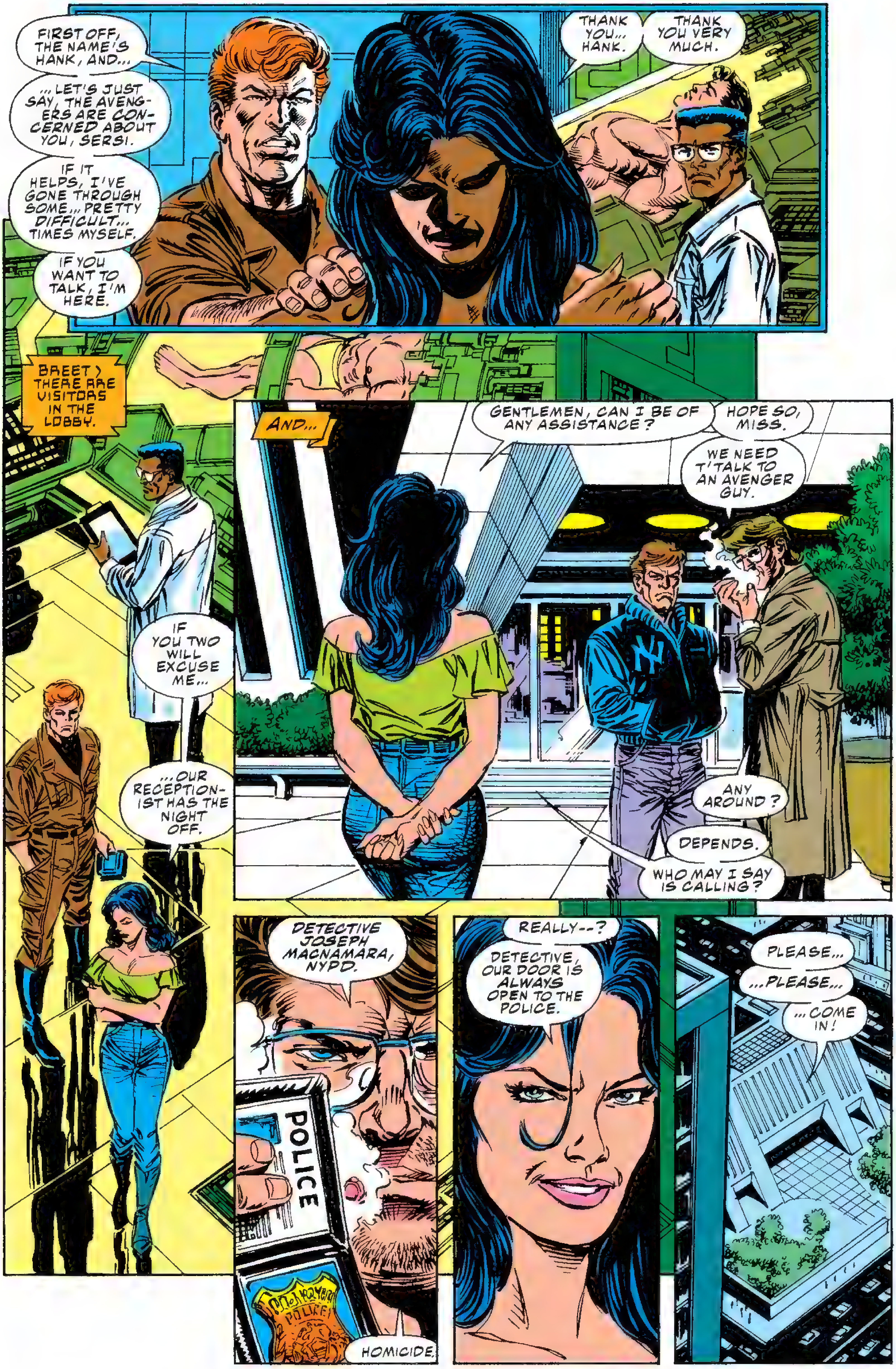

SLOTH IS RIGHT! QUESTIONS ARE IRRELEVANT!
I STOPPED YOU ONCE, BLACK WIDOW... YOU ARE VERY FOOLISH TO CROSS ME AGAIN!
SSHAM!
'TASHA, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?!
I'M FINE, STEVE.
DANE'S PSIONIC ARMOR WORKED LIKE A CHARM, NEUTRALIZING MOST OF CASSANDRA'S SYNAPTIC ATTACK!
VASHAM
MADAM, I BELIEVE I OWE YOU ONE!
ARRGHH!
PUNT!
CASSIE!
YE'VE STRUCK DOWN CASSIE!

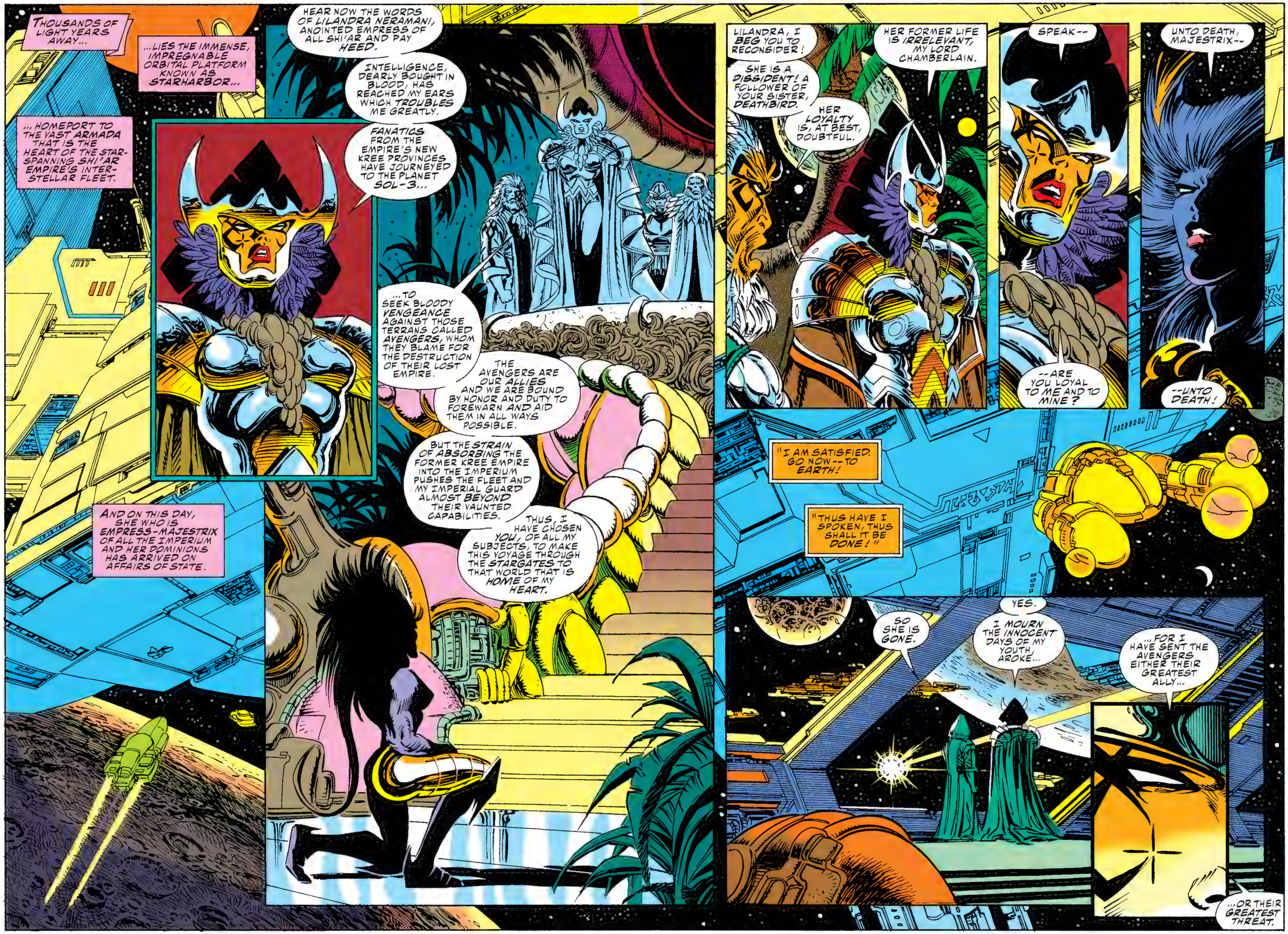
YE'LL NOT GET AWAY WITH **THAT**, AVENGERS!
RIPP!
VISION...? IS THAT YOU?
RANDAK'S GENES, **WHAT** HAVE THEY **DONE** TO YOU?
CRYSTAL, BEHIND YOU--!
SWOOSH!
TOO LATE, AVENGER! FAR, **FAR** TOO LATE!
RUMBLE
I'M AFRAID NOT, SLOTH.
A SEISMIC FORCE BLAST SHOULD TAKE CARE OF THINGS.
MOST IMPRESSIVE, CRYSTAL.
AYE, IT WAS GOOD VISION! AND I AM **OVERJOYED** TO SEE THEE HALE AND HEARTY, IF SOMEWHAT TRANSFORMED!
OOOFFF!
BUT, OUR REUNION MUST BE BRIEF, DEAR COMRADE--
--FOR THE **PRINCE OF POWER**--
--MUST NEEDS TAKE CARE OF--
--THIS OVERGROWN **PORCINE** MISCREANT--

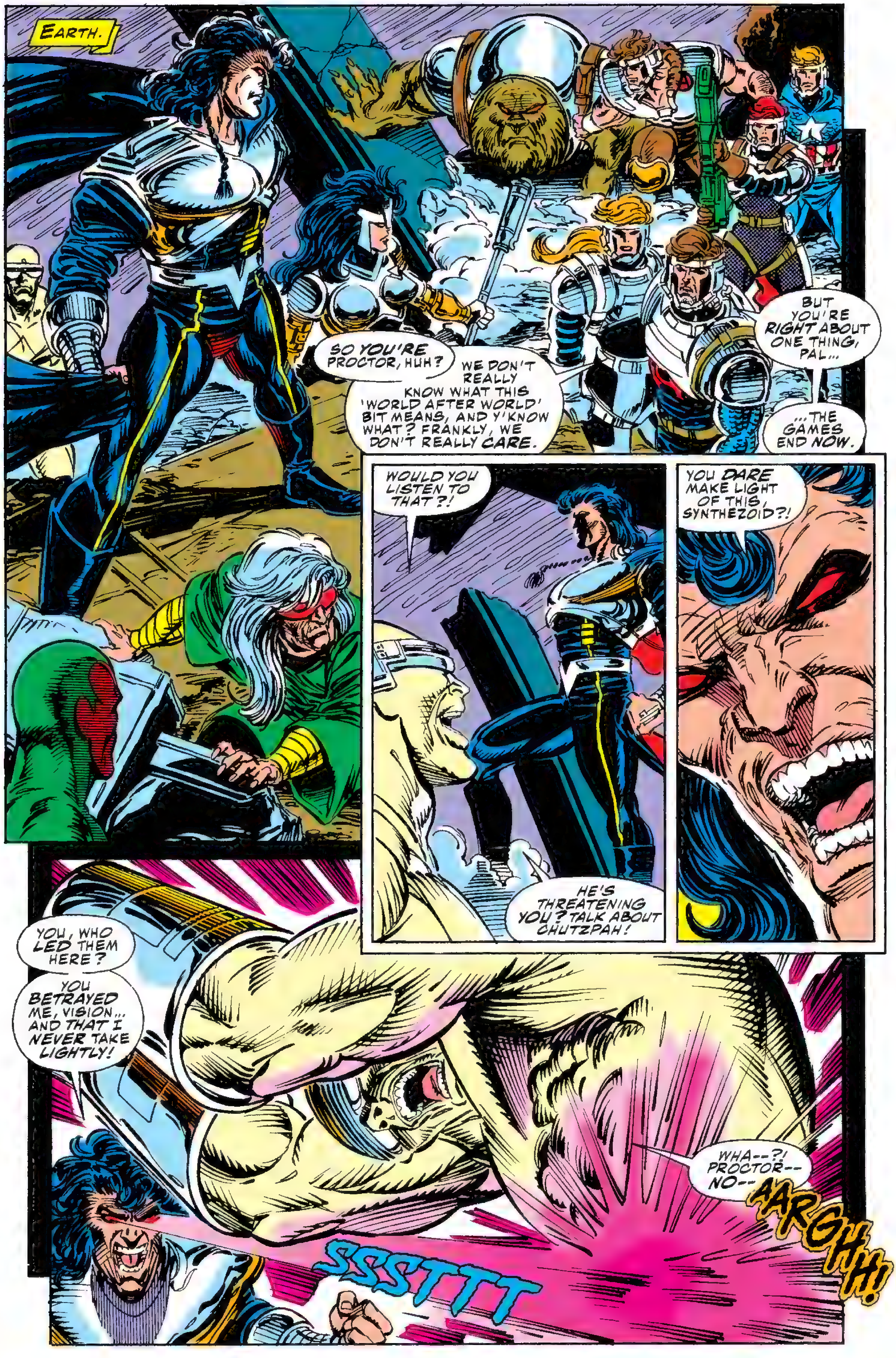

--ONCE AND FOR ALL!
WHUMP!
THIS IS FOR THE PAIN THOU HAST INFLICTED ON MY FELLOWS, GATHERER!
POW!
AND THIS--
BAM!
--IS FOR THE COAL TIGER AND MARRISSA DARROW!
ABOVE...
TSK, TSK, TSK, MAGGIE--
--I THINK YOU'RE SLOWING DOWN IN YOUR OLD AGE, LADY!
VSSSH
YOUR PRIDE SHALL LEAD TO YOUR FALL, AVENGER--
--MY POWER LANCE WILL DEMOLISH YOU!
I DON'T THINK SO!
SSSZZZ
WHAT?!
THIS ISN'T POSSIBLE!

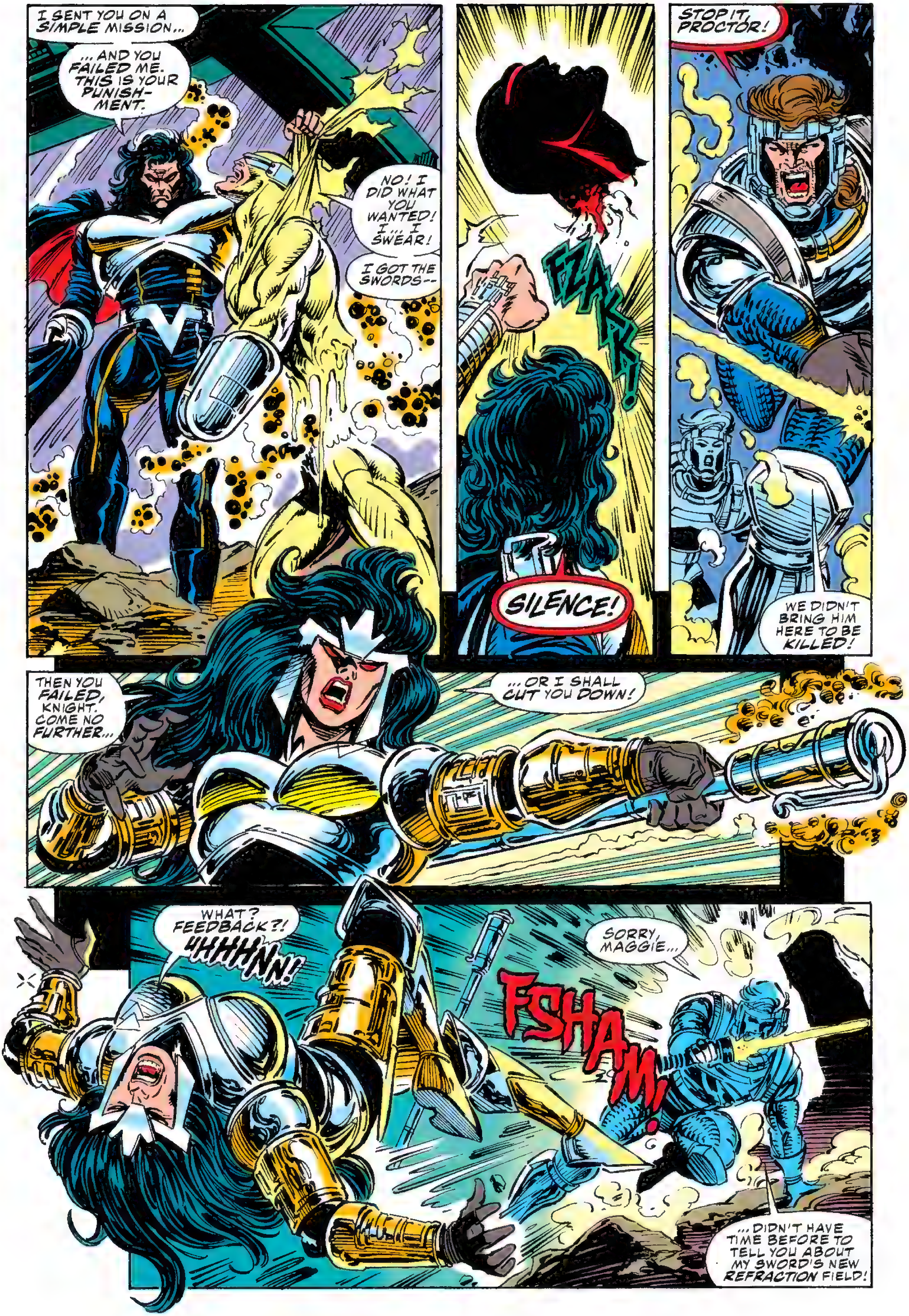

SURE IT IS!
ALL I HAD TO DO WAS MATCH MY SWORD'S ENERGY MODULATION TO YOUR LANCE'S POWER FIELD!
IT WAS SIMPLE ONCE I FIG--
KA-BOOM!
YOU HAVE COME TO THE FAR PLACES OF THE EARTH, AVENGERS. MY PRECIOUS SECLUSION IS NO MORE.
WHO IN THE WORLD--?
PROCTOR!
OUR TRUE NEMESIS, CAPTAIN AMERICA.
THE MAN CALLED--
THANK THE FATES!
THE TIME, THEN, HAS COME FOR THE GAMES AND DISTRACTIONS TO END.
AND YOU, WHO HAVE EVER FAILED ON WORLD AFTER MISERABLE WORLD MUST NOW PAY THE PRICE!

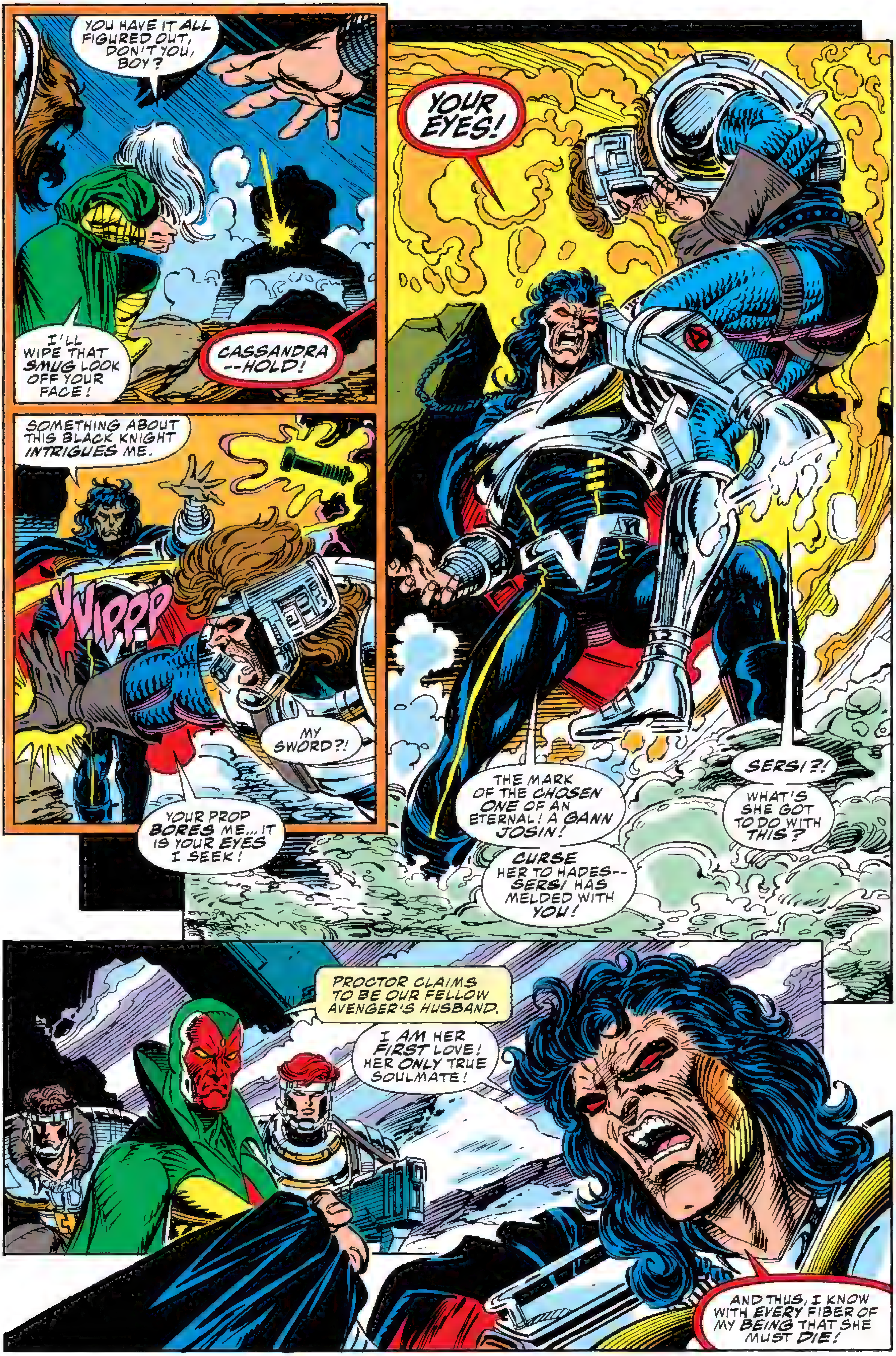

NEW YORK CITY.
AVENGERS MANSION...
...WHERE TWO MEN HAVE ANSWERED A MOST URGENT SUMMONS.
WE GOT IT, HANK!
THE STASIS CHAMBER IS FULLY OPERATIONAL. THE SWORDSMAN SHOULD BE IN COMPLETE SUSPENDED ANIMATION.
BIO-SCANS CONFIRM, BILL. WE'VE GOT HIM STABILIZED.
THANK HEAVEN.
IT'S A MIRACLE THE KNIGHT WAS ABLE TO JURY-RIG THIS SYSTEM AFTER THE FAKE VISION'S ATTACK. BIO-TECHNICS IS NOT HIS SPECIALTY.
BUT THEN DANE IS A REMARKABLE MAN, ISN'T HE?
DR. PYM, DR. FORSTER, IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO TO HELP?
SERSI.
I'M AFRAID NOT.
WE'VE DONE AS MUCH AS WE CAN FOR THE SWORDSMAN.
DR. PYM, I'D LIKE US TO BE UPFRONT WITH ONE ANOTHER...
I KNOW THE OTHER REASON YOU'RE HERE...
...IS TO EXAMINE ME...
...TO SEE IF I'M INSANE.

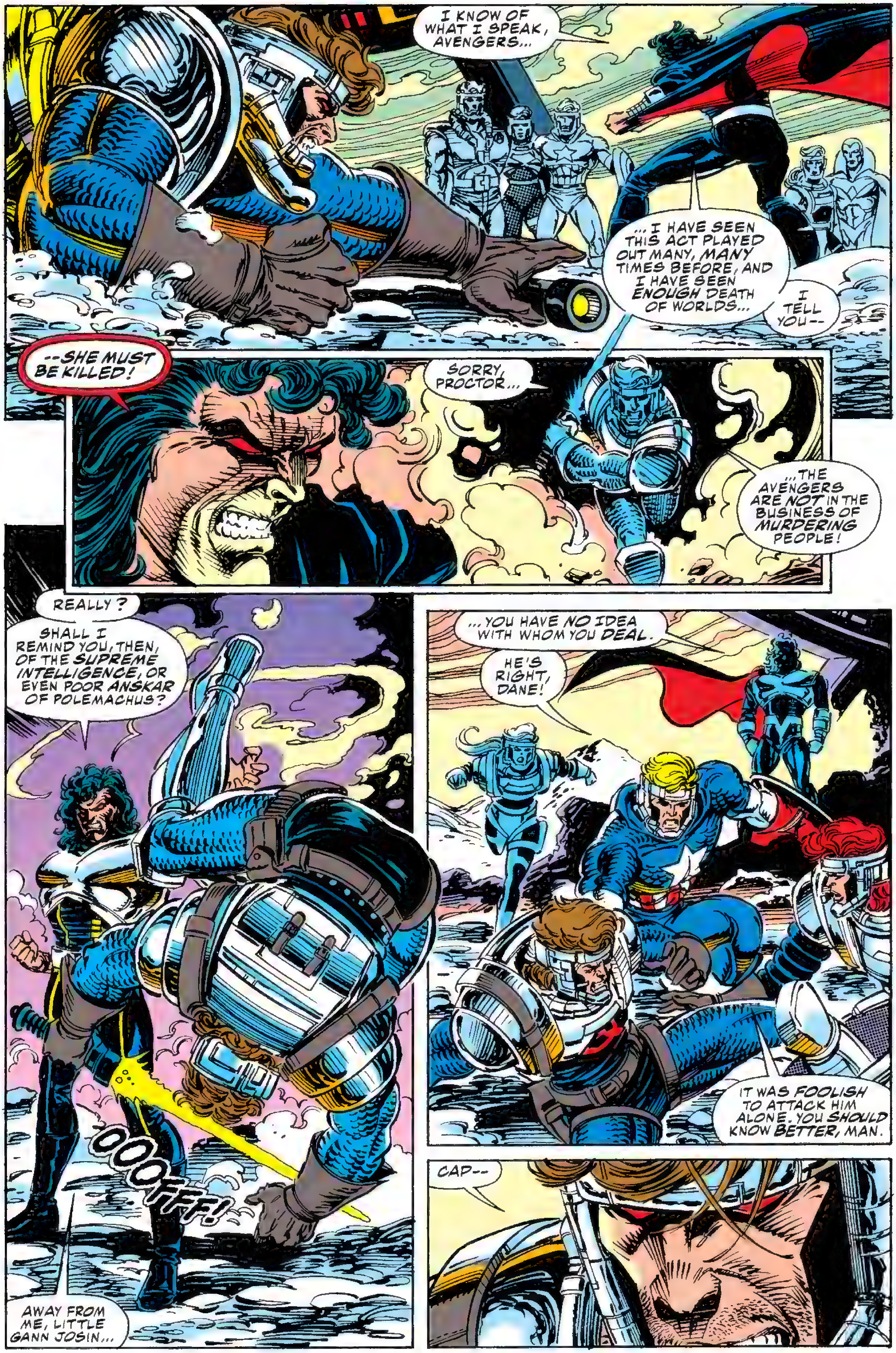

FIRST OFF, THE NAME'S HANK, AND...
...LET'S JUST SAY, THE AVENGERS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT YOU, SERSI.
IF IT HELPS, I'VE GONE THROUGH SOME... PRETTY DIFFICULT... TIMES MYSELF.
IF YOU WANT TO TALK, I'M HERE.
THANK YOU... HANK.
THANK YOU VERY MUCH.
BREET > THERE ARE VISITORS IN THE LOBBY.
IF YOU TWO WILL EXCUSE ME...
...OUR RECEPTIONIST HAS THE NIGHT OFF.
AND...
GENTLEMEN, CAN I BE OF ANY ASSISTANCE?
HOPE SO, MISS.
WE NEED T'TALK TO AN AVENGER GUY.
ANY AROUND?
DEPENDS.
WHO MAY I SAY IS CALLING?
DETECTIVE JOSEPH MACNAMARA, NYPD.
POLICE
HOMICIDE.
REALLY--?
DETECTIVE, OUR DOOR IS ALWAYS OPEN TO THE POLICE.
PLEASE...
...PLEASE...
...COME IN!

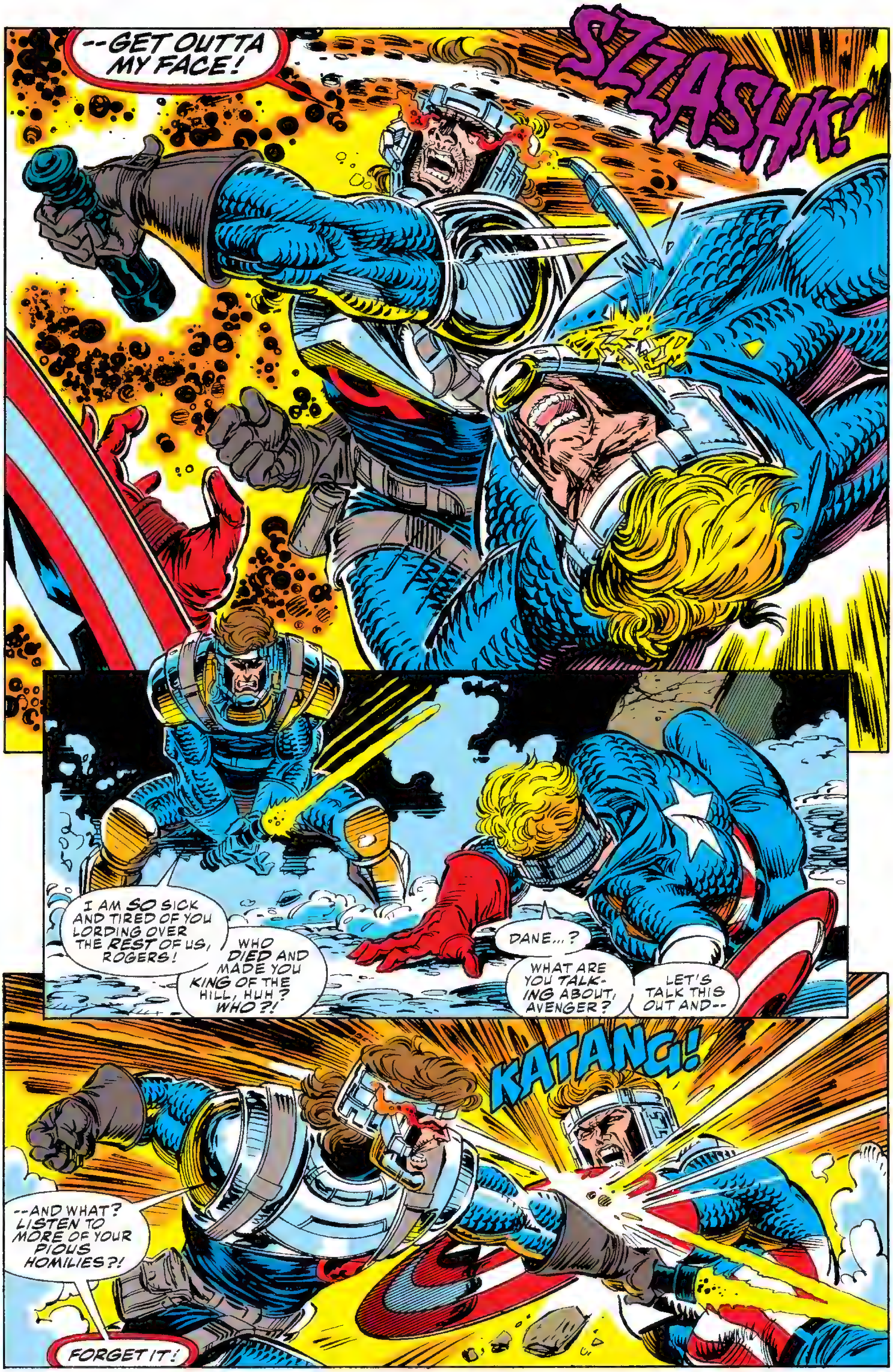

THOUSANDS OF LIGHT YEARS AWAY...
...LIES THE IMMENSE, IMPREGNABLE ORBITAL PLATFORM KNOWN AS STARHARBOR...
...HOMEPORT TO THE VAST ARMADA THAT IS THE HEART OF THE STAR-SPANNING SHI'AR EMPIRE'S INTERSTELLAR FLEET.
AND ON THIS DAY, SHE WHO IS EMPRESS-MAJESTRIX OF ALL THE IMPERIUM AND HER DOMINIONS HAS ARRIVED ON AFFAIRS OF STATE.
HEAR NOW THE WORDS OF LILANDRA NERAMANI, ANOINTED EMPRESS OF ALL SHI'AR AND PAY HEED.
INTELLIGENCE, DEARLY BOUGHT IN BLOOD, HAS REACHED MY EARS WHICH TROUBLES ME GREATLY.
FANATICS FROM THE EMPIRE'S NEW KREE PROVINCES HAVE JOURNEYED TO THE PLANET SOL-3...
...TO SEEK BLOODY VENGEANCE AGAINST THOSE TERRANS CALLED AVENGERS, WHOM THEY BLAME FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF THEIR LOST EMPIRE.
THE AVENGERS ARE OUR ALLIES AND WE ARE BOUND BY HONOR AND DUTY TO FOREWARN AND AID THEM IN ALL WAYS POSSIBLE.
BUT THE STRAIN OF ABSORBING THE FORMER KREE EMPIRE INTO THE IMPERIUM PUSHES THE FLEET AND MY IMPERIAL GUARD ALMOST BEYOND THEIR VAUNTED CAPABILITIES.
THUS, I HAVE CHOSEN YOU, OF ALL MY SUBJECTS, TO MAKE THIS VOYAGE THROUGH THE STARGATES TO THAT WORLD THAT IS HOME OF MY HEART.
LILANDRA, I BEG YOU TO RECONSIDER! SHE IS A DISSIDENT! A FOLLOWER OF YOUR SISTER, DEATHBIRD.
HER LOYALTY IS, AT BEST, DOUBTFUL.
HER FORMER LIFE IS IRRELEVANT, MY LORD CHAMBERLAIN.
SPEAK--
--ARE YOU LOYAL TO ME AND TO MINE?
UNTO DEATH, MAJESTRIX--
--UNTO DEATH!
"I AM SATISFIED. GO NOW--TO EARTH!
"THUS HAVE I SPOKEN, THUS SHALL IT BE DONE!"
SO SHE IS GONE.
YES.
I MOURN THE INNOCENT DAYS OF MY YOUTH, AROKE...
...FOR I HAVE SENT THE AVENGERS EITHER THEIR GREATEST ALLY...
...OR THEIR GREATEST THREAT.

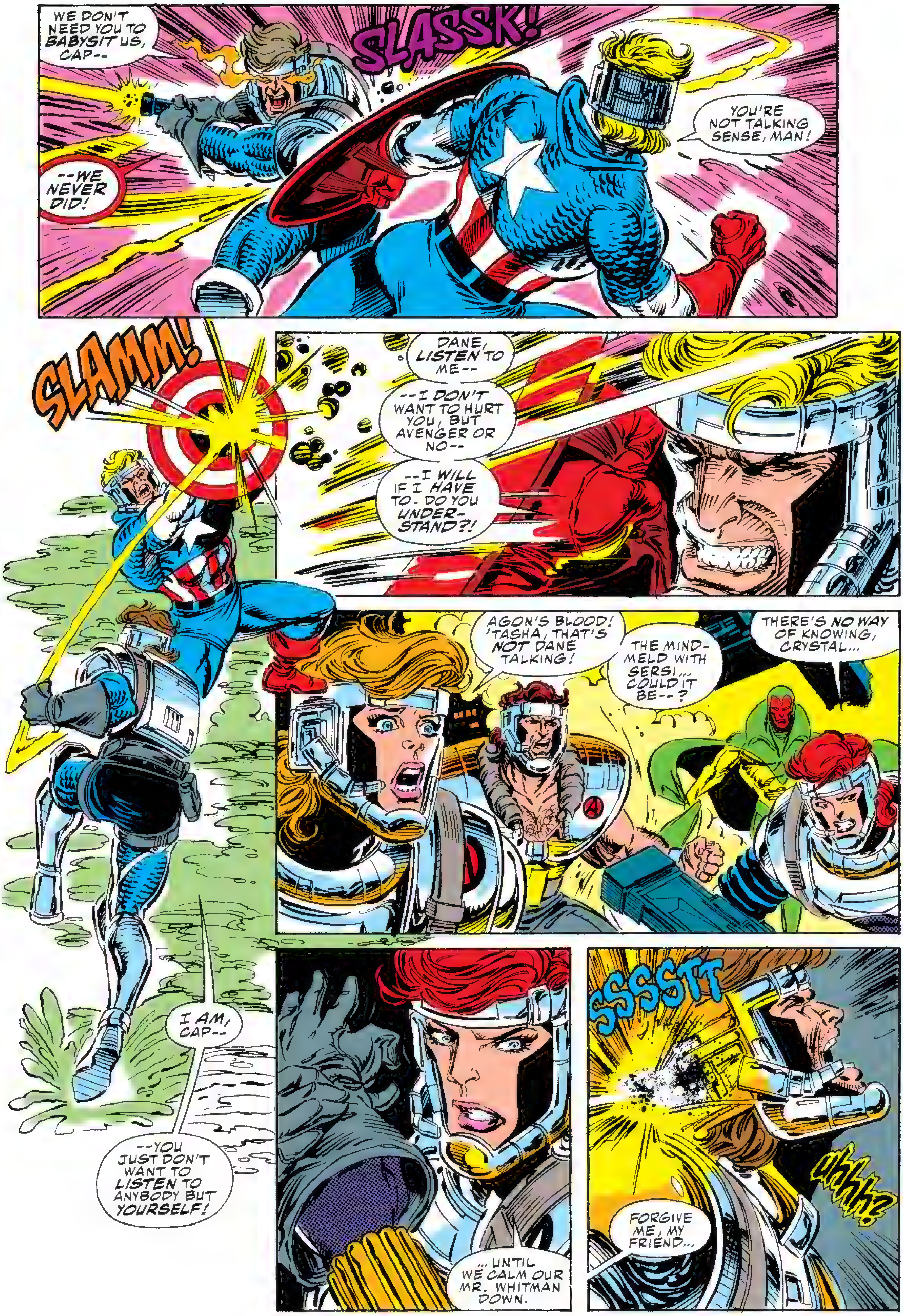

EARTH.
SO *YOU'RE* PROCTOR, HUH?
WE DON'T REALLY KNOW WHAT THIS 'WORLD AFTER WORLD' BIT MEANS, AND Y'KNOW WHAT? FRANKLY, WE DON'T REALLY *CARE*.
BUT YOU'RE *RIGHT* ABOUT ONE THING, PAL...
...THE GAMES END *NOW*.
WOULD YOU LISTEN TO THAT?!
HE'S THREATENING *YOU*? TALK ABOUT CHUTZPAH!
YOU *DARE* MAKE LIGHT OF THIS, SYNTHEZOID?!
YOU, WHO *LED* THEM HERE?
YOU BETRAYED ME, VISION... AND *THAT* I NEVER TAKE LIGHTLY!
WHA--?! PROCTOR-- NO--
AARGHH!
SSSTTT


I SENT YOU ON A SIMPLE MISSION...
...AND YOU FAILED ME. THIS IS YOUR PUNISHMENT.
NO! I DID WHAT YOU WANTED! I... I SWEAR!
I GOT THE SWORDS--
FZAAK!
SILENCE!
STOP IT, PROCTOR!
WE DIDN'T BRING HIM HERE TO BE KILLED!
THEN YOU FAILED, KNIGHT. COME NO FURTHER...
...OR I SHALL CUT YOU DOWN!
WHAT? FEEDBACK?!
UHHHNN!
SORRY, MAGGIE...
FSHAM!
...DIDN'T HAVE TIME BEFORE TO TELL YOU ABOUT MY SWORD'S NEW REFRACTION FIELD!

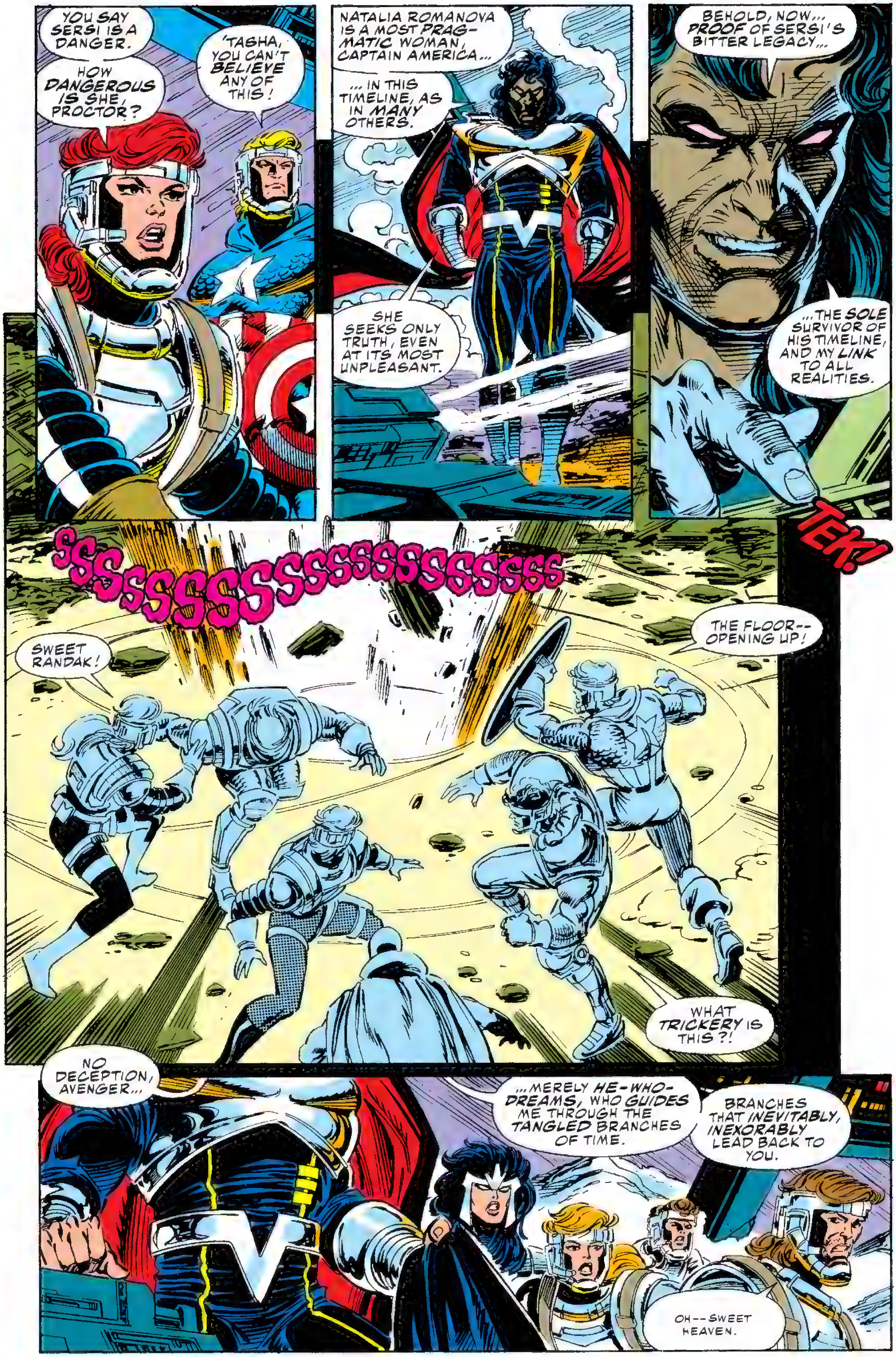

YOU HAVE IT ALL FIGURED OUT, DON'T YOU, BOY?
I'LL WIPE THAT SMUG LOOK OFF YOUR FACE!
CASSANDRA --HOLD!
SOMETHING ABOUT THIS BLACK KNIGHT INTRIGUES ME.
VVIPPP
MY SWORD?!
YOUR PROP BORES ME... IT IS YOUR EYES I SEEK!
YOUR EYES!
THE MARK OF THE CHOSEN ONE OF AN ETERNAL! A GANN JOSIN!
SERSI?!
WHAT'S SHE GOT TO DO WITH THIS?
CURSE HER TO HADES-- SERSI HAS MELDED WITH YOU!
PROCTOR CLAIMS TO BE OUR FELLOW AVENGER'S HUSBAND.
I AM HER FIRST LOVE! HER ONLY TRUE SOULMATE!
AND THUS, I KNOW WITH EVERY FIBER OF MY BEING THAT SHE MUST DIE!

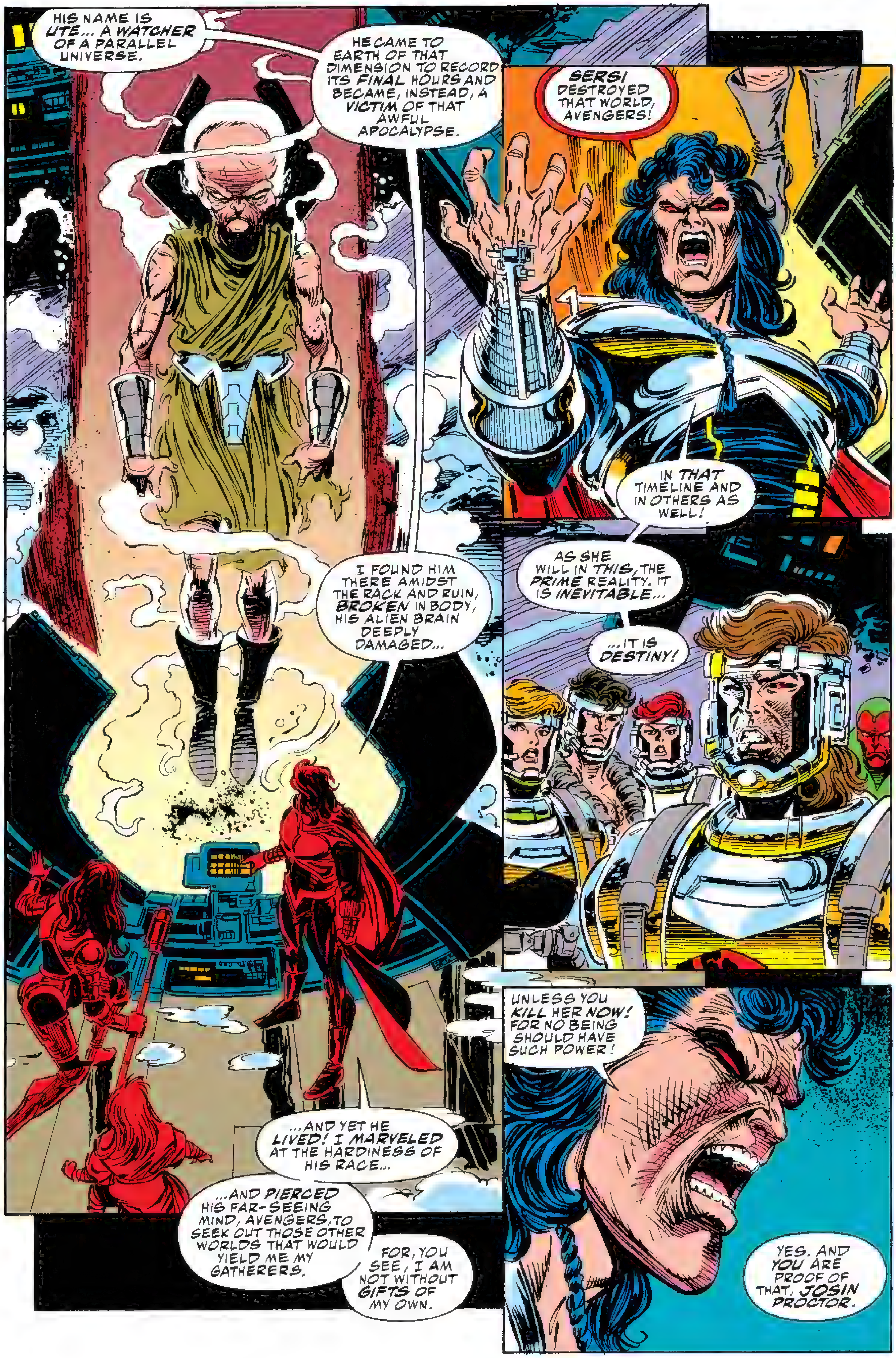

I KNOW OF WHAT I SPEAK, AVENGERS...
...I HAVE SEEN THIS ACT PLAYED OUT MANY, *MANY* TIMES BEFORE, AND I HAVE SEEN *ENOUGH* DEATH OF WORLDS...
I TELL YOU--
--SHE MUST BE KILLED!
SORRY, PROCTOR...
...THE AVENGERS ARE *NOT* IN THE BUSINESS OF *MURDERING* PEOPLE!
REALLY?
SHALL I REMIND YOU, THEN, OF THE *SUPREME INTELLIGENCE*, OR EVEN POOR *ANSKAR* OF POLEMACHUS?
OOOFFF!
AWAY FROM ME, LITTLE GANN JOSIN...
...YOU HAVE *NO* IDEA WITH WHOM YOU *DEAL*.
HE'S RIGHT, DANE!
IT WAS *FOOLISH* TO ATTACK HIM ALONE. YOU *SHOULD* KNOW *BETTER*, MAN.
CAP--

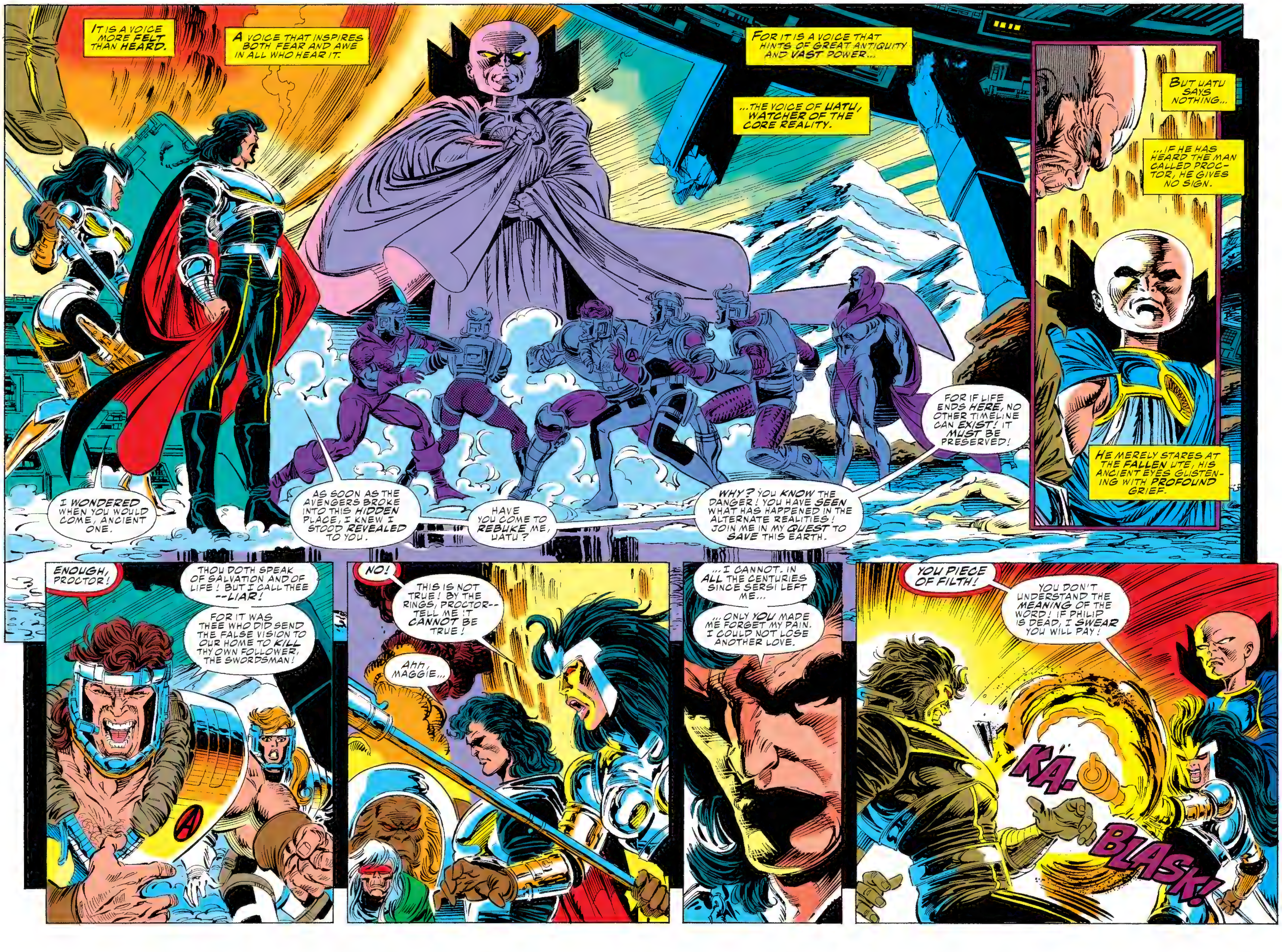

--GET OUTTA MY FACE!
SZZASHK!
I AM *SO* SICK AND TIRED OF YOU LORDING OVER THE *REST* OF US, ROGERS!
WHO *DIED* AND MADE YOU *KING* OF THE HILL, HUH? *WHO?!*
DANE...?
WHAT ARE YOU *TALKING* ABOUT, AVENGER?
LET'S TALK THIS OUT AND--
KATANG!
--AND WHAT? LISTEN TO MORE OF YOUR *PIOUS HOMILIES?!*
FORGET IT!

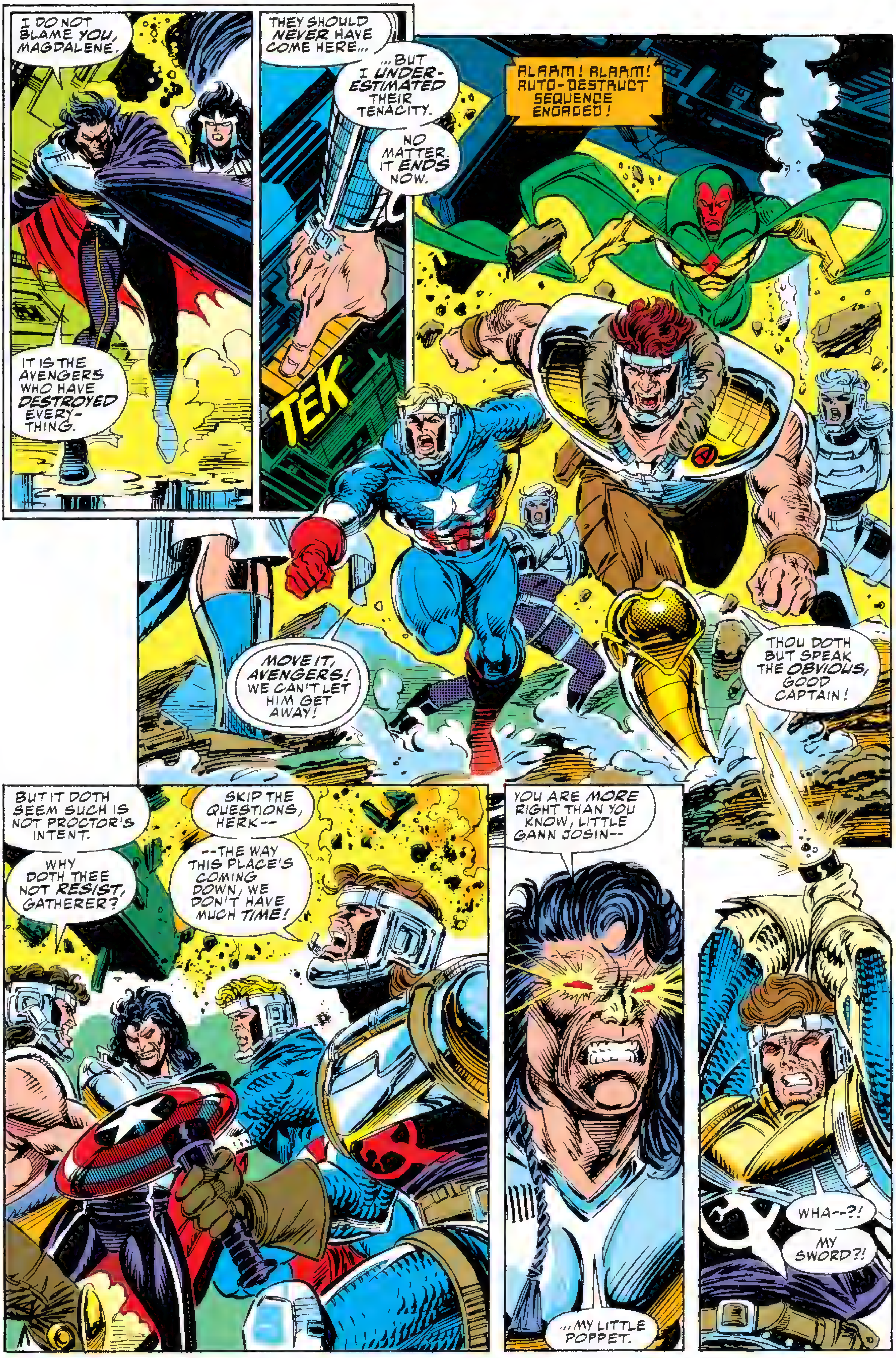

WE DON'T NEED YOU TO BABYSIT US, CAP--
--WE NEVER DID!
SLASSK!
YOU'RE NOT TALKING SENSE, MAN!
SLAMM!
DANE, LISTEN TO ME--
--I DON'T WANT TO HURT YOU, BUT AVENGER OR NO--
--I WILL IF I HAVE TO. DO YOU UNDERSTAND?!
I AM, CAP--
--YOU JUST DON'T WANT TO LISTEN TO ANYBODY BUT YOURSELF!
AGON'S BLOOD! 'TASHA, THAT'S NOT DANE TALKING!
THE MIND-MELD WITH SERSI... COULD IT BE--?
THERE'S NO WAY OF KNOWING, CRYSTAL...
...UNTIL WE CALM OUR MR. WHITMAN DOWN.
SSSSTT
UHHH?
FORGIVE ME, MY FRIEND...

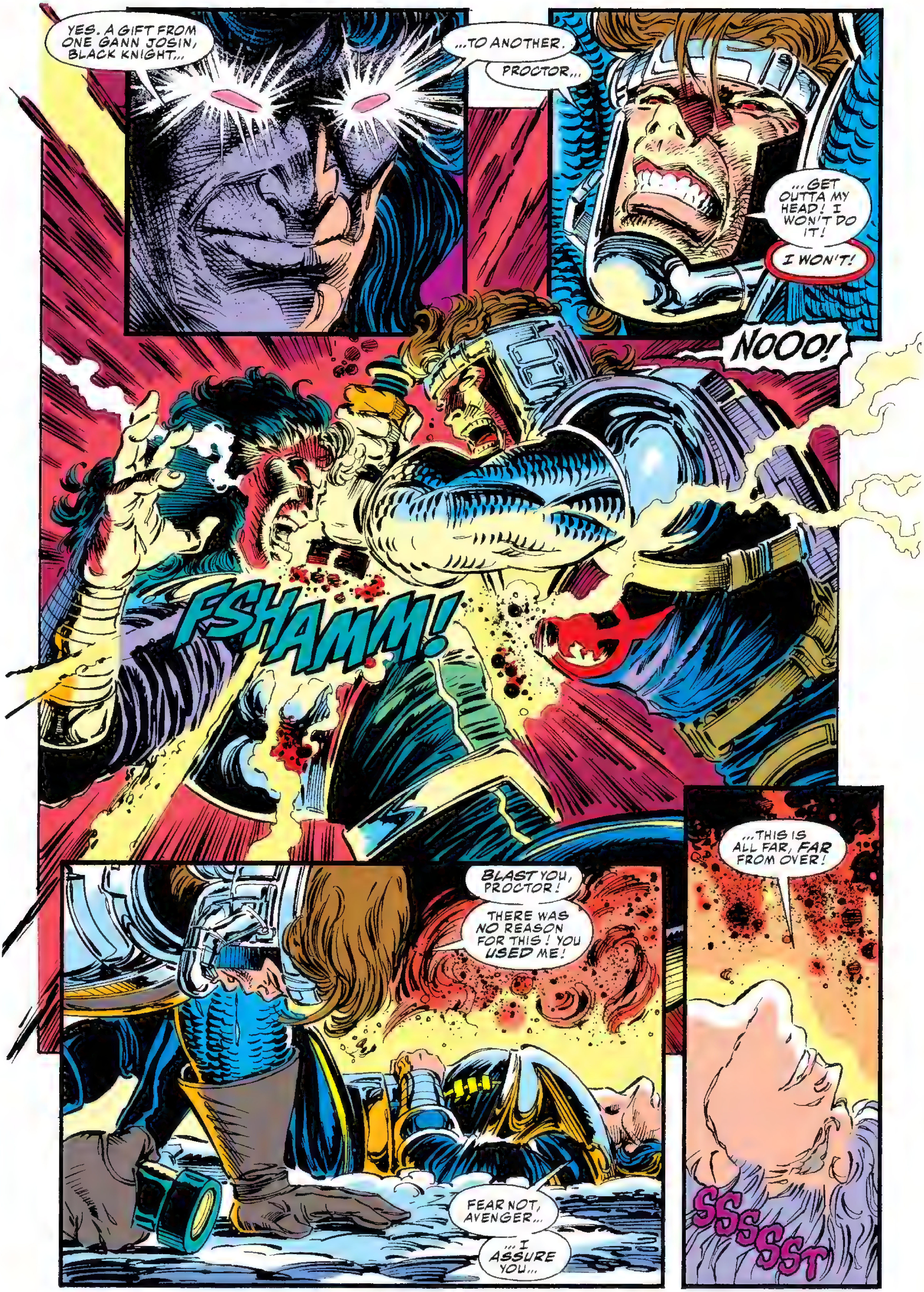
...BUT MY WIDOW'S STING WAS CLEARLY CALLED FOR.
IS HE ALL RIGHT, CRYSTAL?
HE'S COMING 'ROUND, CAP.
MY GOD, CAP...
...I'M SORRY, MAN...
...DUNNO WHAT CAME OVER ME... JUS' SAW RED.
JUST RELAX, DANE. IT'S OKAY.
THUS, THE MADNESS SPREADS, AVENGERS.
THIS IS BUT THE BRIEFEST TASTE OF WHAT IS TO COME.
HIS MIND IS ASSIMILATING THAT OF SERSI'S. I, TOO, REMEMBER THAT AGONY, FOR IT ALMOST DESTROYED ME.
BEWARE, DANE WHITMAN, SHE IS FAR, FAR GONE. TO MELD WITH ONE SUCH AS SHE IS A MOST DANGEROUS THING.

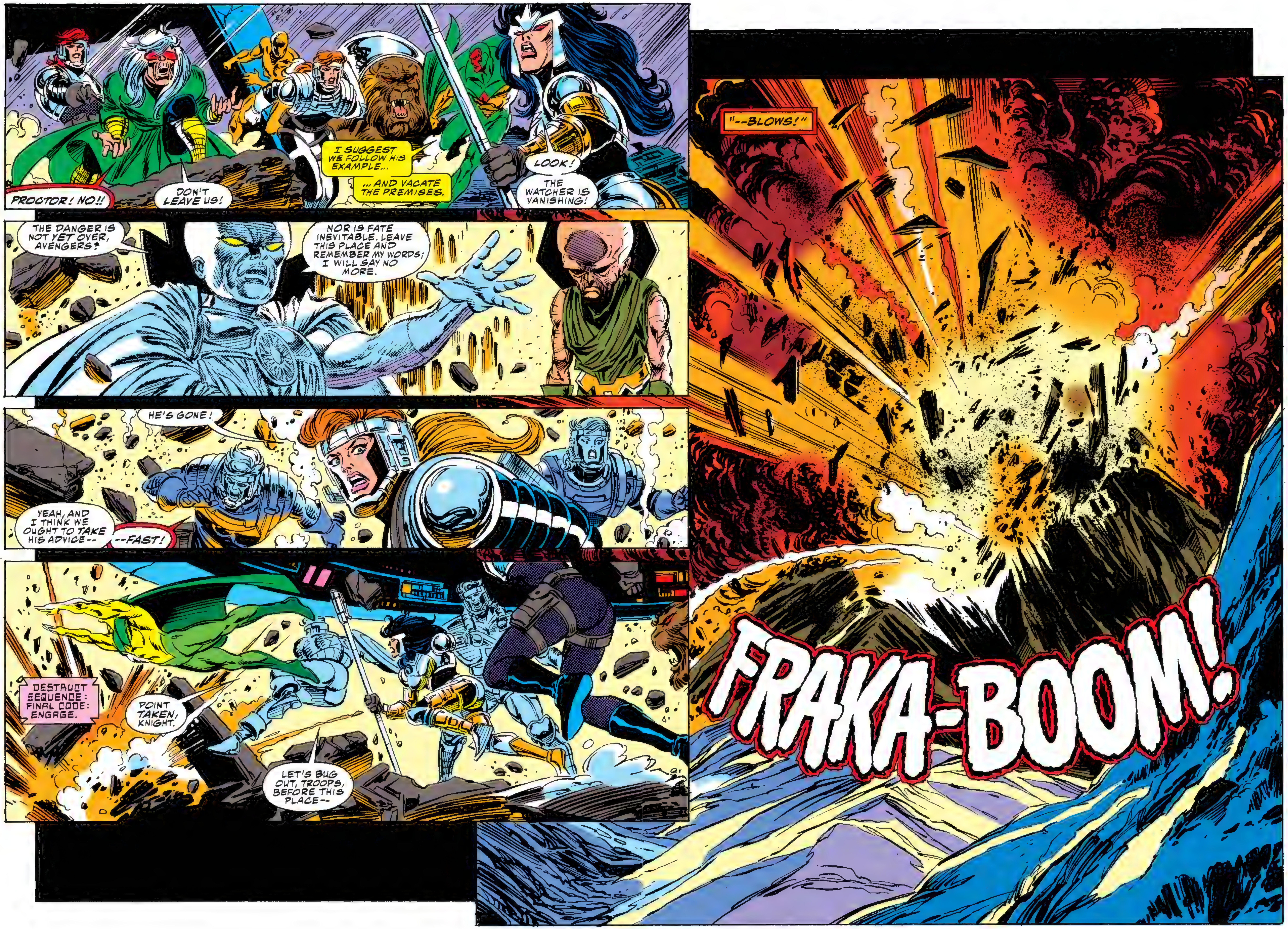

YOU SAY SERSI IS A DANGER.
HOW DANGEROUS IS SHE, PROCTOR?
'TASHA, YOU CAN'T BELIEVE ANY OF THIS!
NATALIA ROMANOVA IS A MOST PRAGMATIC WOMAN, CAPTAIN AMERICA...
...IN THIS TIMELINE, AS IN MANY OTHERS.
SHE SEEKS ONLY TRUTH, EVEN AT ITS MOST UNPLEASANT.
BEHOLD, NOW... PROOF OF SERSI'S BITTER LEGACY...
...THE SOLE SURVIVOR OF HIS TIMELINE, AND MY LINK TO ALL REALITIES.
TEK!
SSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS
SWEET RANDAK!
THE FLOOR-- OPENING UP!
WHAT TRICKERY IS THIS?!
NO DECEPTION, AVENGER...
...MERELY HE-WHO-DREAMS, WHO GUIDES ME THROUGH THE TANGLED BRANCHES OF TIME.
BRANCHES THAT INEVITABLY, INEXORABLY LEAD BACK TO YOU.
OH--SWEET HEAVEN.

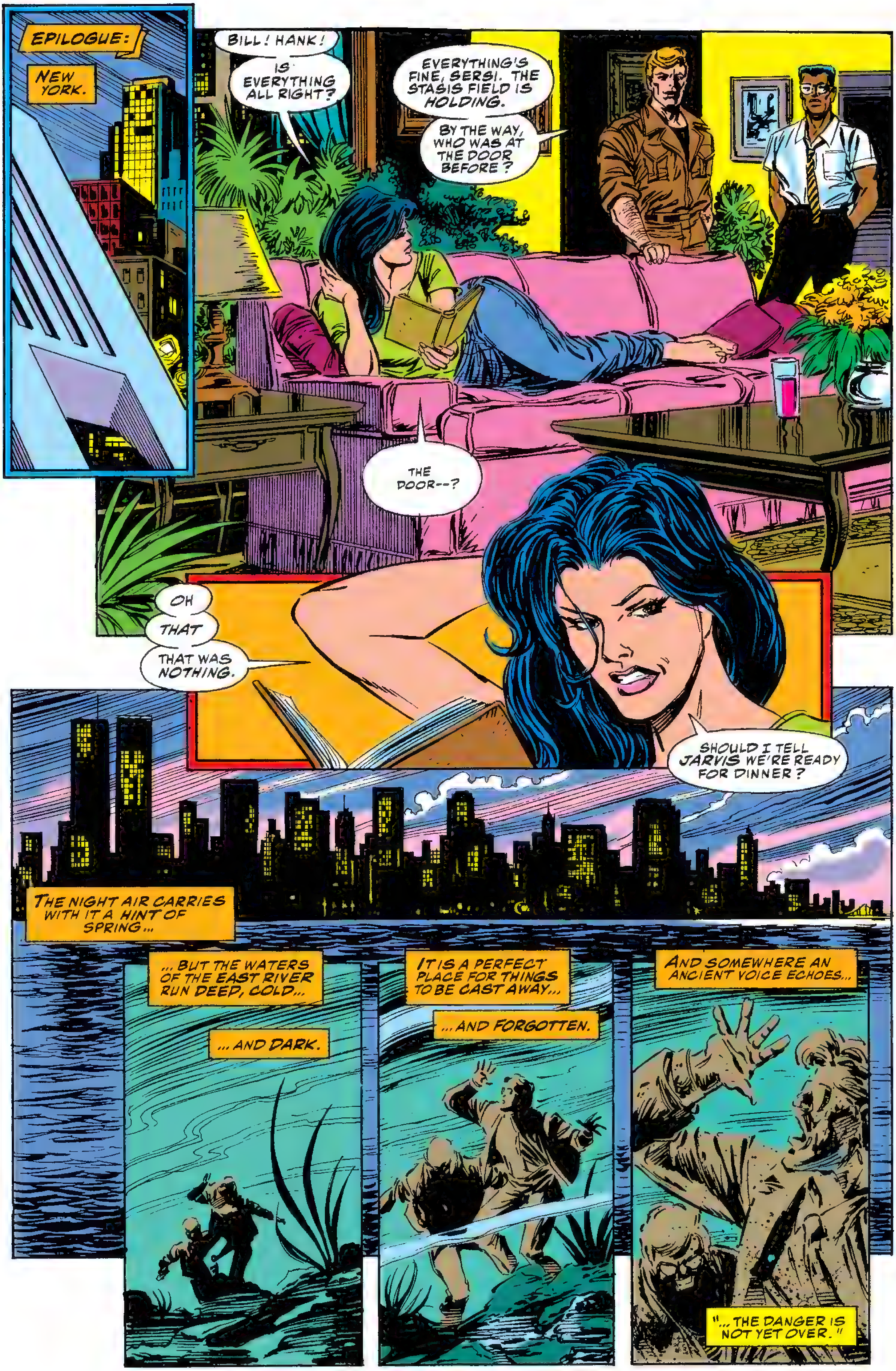

HIS NAME IS *UTE*... A *WATCHER* OF A PARALLEL UNIVERSE.
HE CAME TO EARTH OF THAT DIMENSION TO RECORD ITS *FINAL* HOURS AND BECAME, INSTEAD, A *VICTIM* OF THAT AWFUL APOCALYPSE.
I FOUND HIM THERE AMIDST THE RACK AND RUIN, *BROKEN* IN BODY, HIS ALIEN BRAIN DEEPLY DAMAGED...
...AND YET HE *LIVED!* I *MARVELED* AT THE HARDINESS OF HIS RACE...
...AND *PIERCED* HIS FAR-SEEING MIND, AVENGERS, TO SEEK OUT THOSE OTHER WORLDS THAT WOULD YIELD ME MY GATHERERS.
FOR, YOU SEE, I AM NOT WITHOUT *GIFTS* OF MY OWN.
SERSI DESTROYED THAT WORLD, AVENGERS!
IN *THAT* TIMELINE AND IN OTHERS AS WELL!
AS SHE WILL IN *THIS*, THE *PRIME* REALITY. IT IS *INEVITABLE*...
...IT IS *DESTINY!*
UNLESS YOU *KILL* HER *NOW!* FOR NO BEING SHOULD HAVE SUCH POWER!
YES. AND *YOU* ARE PROOF OF THAT, *JOSIN PROCTOR*.


IT IS A VOICE MORE FELT THAN HEARD.
A VOICE THAT INSPIRES BOTH FEAR AND AWE IN ALL WHO HEAR IT.
FOR IT IS A VOICE THAT HINTS OF GREAT ANTIQUITY AND VAST POWER...
...THE VOICE OF UATU, WATCHER OF THE CORE REALITY.
BUT UATU SAYS NOTHING...
...IF HE HAS HEARD THE MAN CALLED PROCTOR, HE GIVES NO SIGN.
HE MERELY STARES AT THE FALLEN UTE, HIS ANCIENT EYES GLISTENING WITH PROFOUND GRIEF.
I WONDERED WHEN YOU WOULD COME, ANCIENT ONE.
AS SOON AS THE AVENGERS BROKE INTO THIS HIDDEN PLACE, I KNEW I STOOD REVEALED TO YOU.
HAVE YOU COME TO REBUKE ME, UATU?
WHY? YOU KNOW THE DANGER! YOU HAVE SEEN WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN THE ALTERNATE REALITIES! JOIN ME IN MY QUEST TO SAVE THIS EARTH.
FOR IF LIFE ENDS HERE, NO OTHER TIMELINE CAN EXIST! IT MUST BE PRESERVED!
ENOUGH, PROCTOR!
THOU DOTH SPEAK OF SALVATION AND OF LIFE! BUT I CALL THEE --LIAR!
FOR IT WAS THEE WHO DID SEND THE FALSE VISION TO OUR HOME TO KILL THY OWN FOLLOWER, THE SWORDSMAN!
NO!
THIS IS NOT TRUE! BY THE RINGS, PROCTOR-- TELL ME IT CANNOT BE TRUE!
AHH, MAGGIE...
...I CANNOT. IN ALL THE CENTURIES SINCE SERSI LEFT ME...
...ONLY YOU MADE ME FORGET MY PAIN. I COULD NOT LOSE ANOTHER LOVE.
YOU PIECE OF FILTH!
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND THE MEANING OF THE WORD! IF PHILIP IS DEAD, I SWEAR YOU WILL PAY!
KA-BLASK!

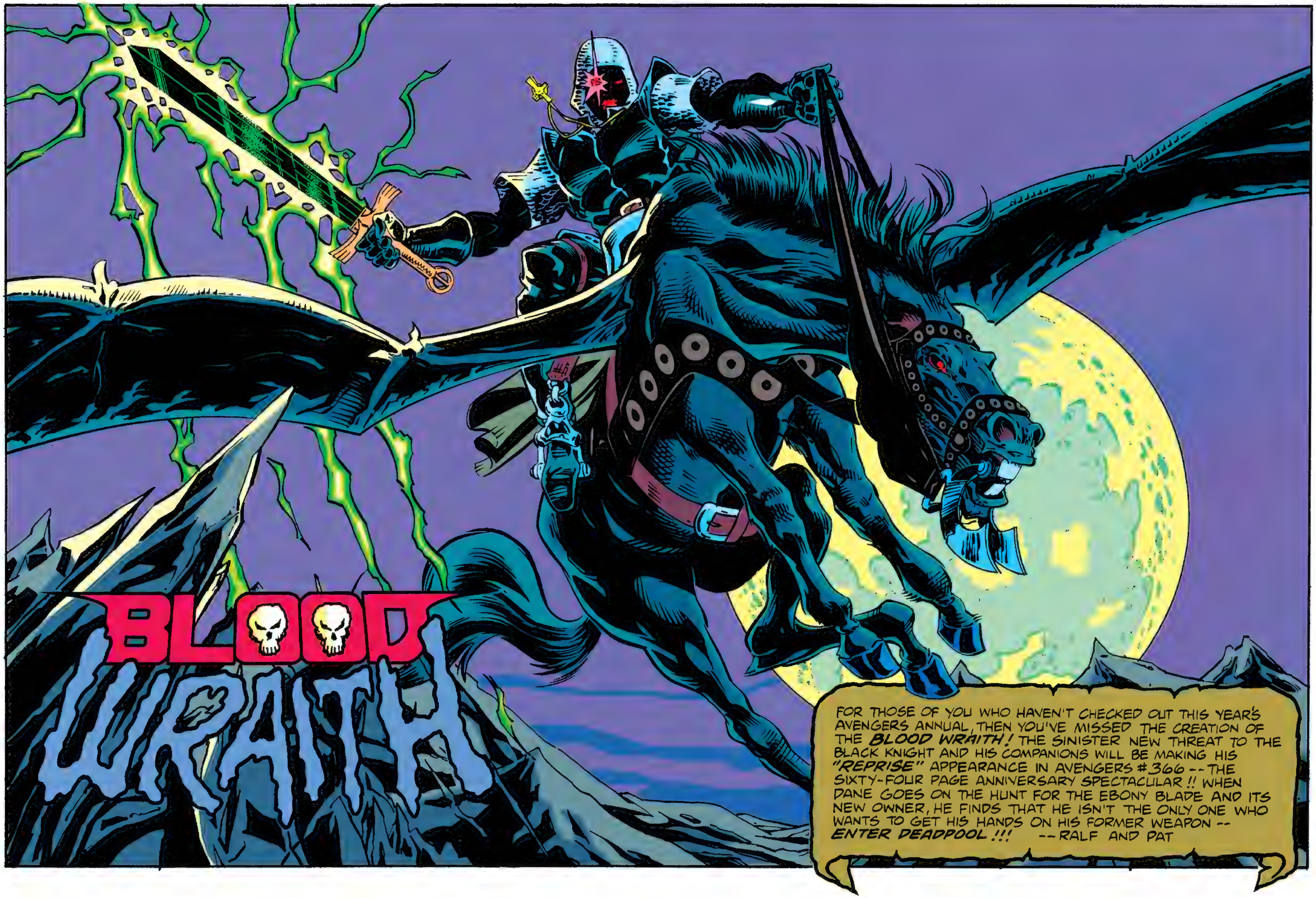

I DO NOT BLAME YOU, MAGDALENE.
IT IS THE AVENGERS WHO HAVE DESTROYED EVERYTHING.
THEY SHOULD NEVER HAVE COME HERE...
...BUT I UNDERESTIMATED THEIR TENACITY.
NO MATTER. IT ENDS NOW.
TEK
ALARM! ALARM! AUTO-DESTRUCT SEQUENCE ENGAGED!
MOVE IT, AVENGERS! WE CAN'T LET HIM GET AWAY!
THOU DOTH BUT SPEAK THE OBVIOUS, GOOD CAPTAIN!
BUT IT DOTH SEEM SUCH IS NOT PROCTOR'S INTENT.
WHY DOTH THEE NOT RESIST, GATHERER?
SKIP THE QUESTIONS, HERK--
--THE WAY THIS PLACE'S COMING DOWN, WE DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME!
YOU ARE MORE RIGHT THAN YOU KNOW, LITTLE GANN JOSIN--
...MY LITTLE POPPET.
WHA--?!
MY SWORD?!


YES. A GIFT FROM ONE GANN JOSIN, BLACK KNIGHT...
...TO ANOTHER.
PROCTOR...
...GET OUTTA MY HEAD! I WON'T DO IT!
I WON'T!
NOOO!
FSHAMM!
BLAST YOU, PROCTOR!
THERE WAS NO REASON FOR THIS! YOU *USED* ME!
FEAR NOT, AVENGER...
...I ASSURE YOU...
...THIS IS ALL FAR, *FAR* FROM OVER!
SSSSST

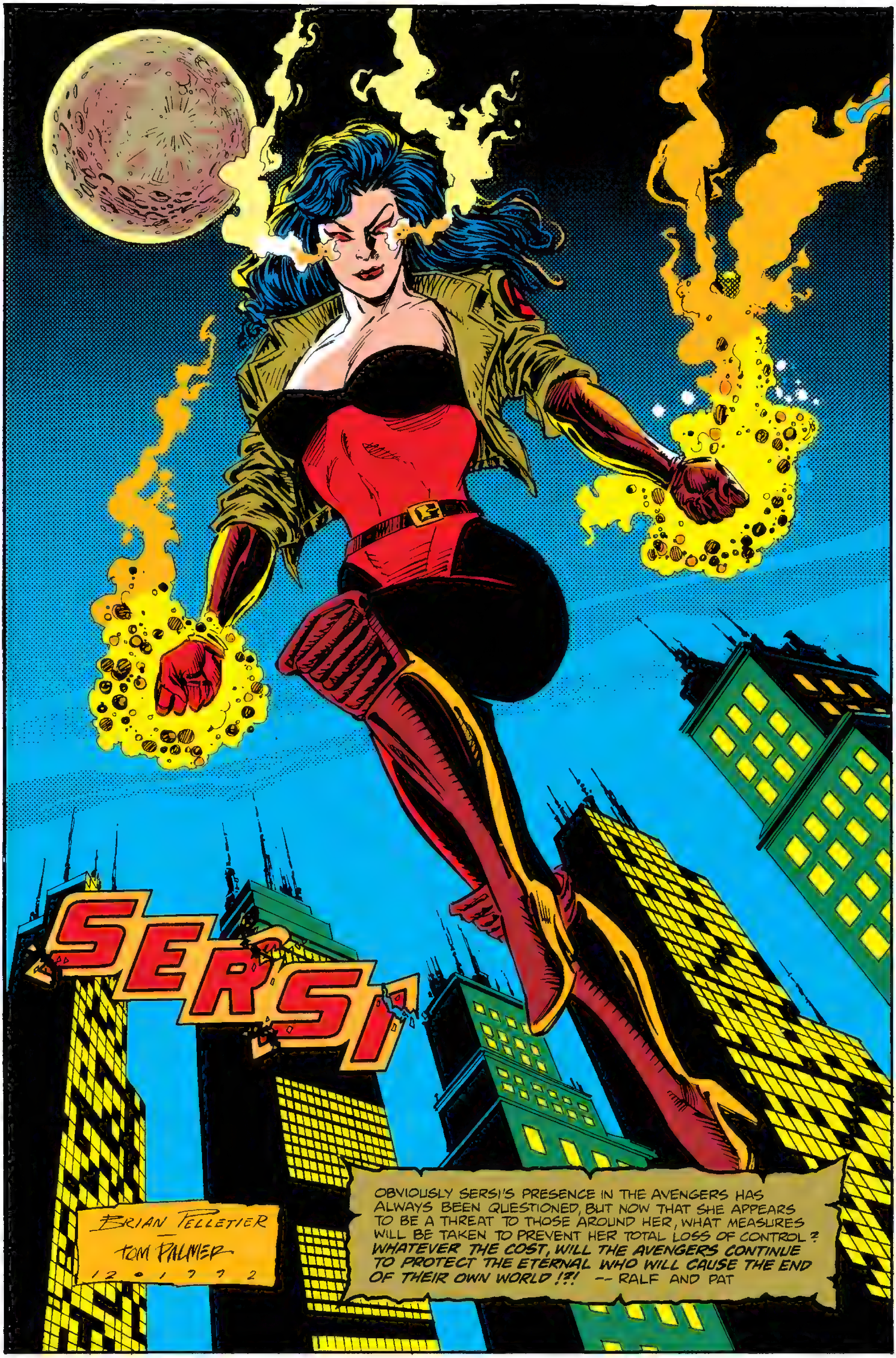

PROCTOR! NO!!
DON'T LEAVE US!
I SUGGEST WE FOLLOW HIS EXAMPLE...
...AND VACATE THE PREMISES.
LOOK!
THE WATCHER IS VANISHING!
THE DANGER IS NOT YET OVER, AVENGERS!
NOR IS FATE INEVITABLE. LEAVE THIS PLACE AND REMEMBER MY WORDS; I WILL SAY NO MORE.
HE'S GONE!
YEAH, AND I THINK WE OUGHT TO TAKE HIS ADVICE--
--FAST!
DESTRUCT SEQUENCE: FINAL CODE: ENGAGE.
POINT TAKEN, KNIGHT.
LET'S BUG OUT, TROOPS, BEFORE THIS PLACE--
"--BLOWS!"
FRAKA-BOOM!

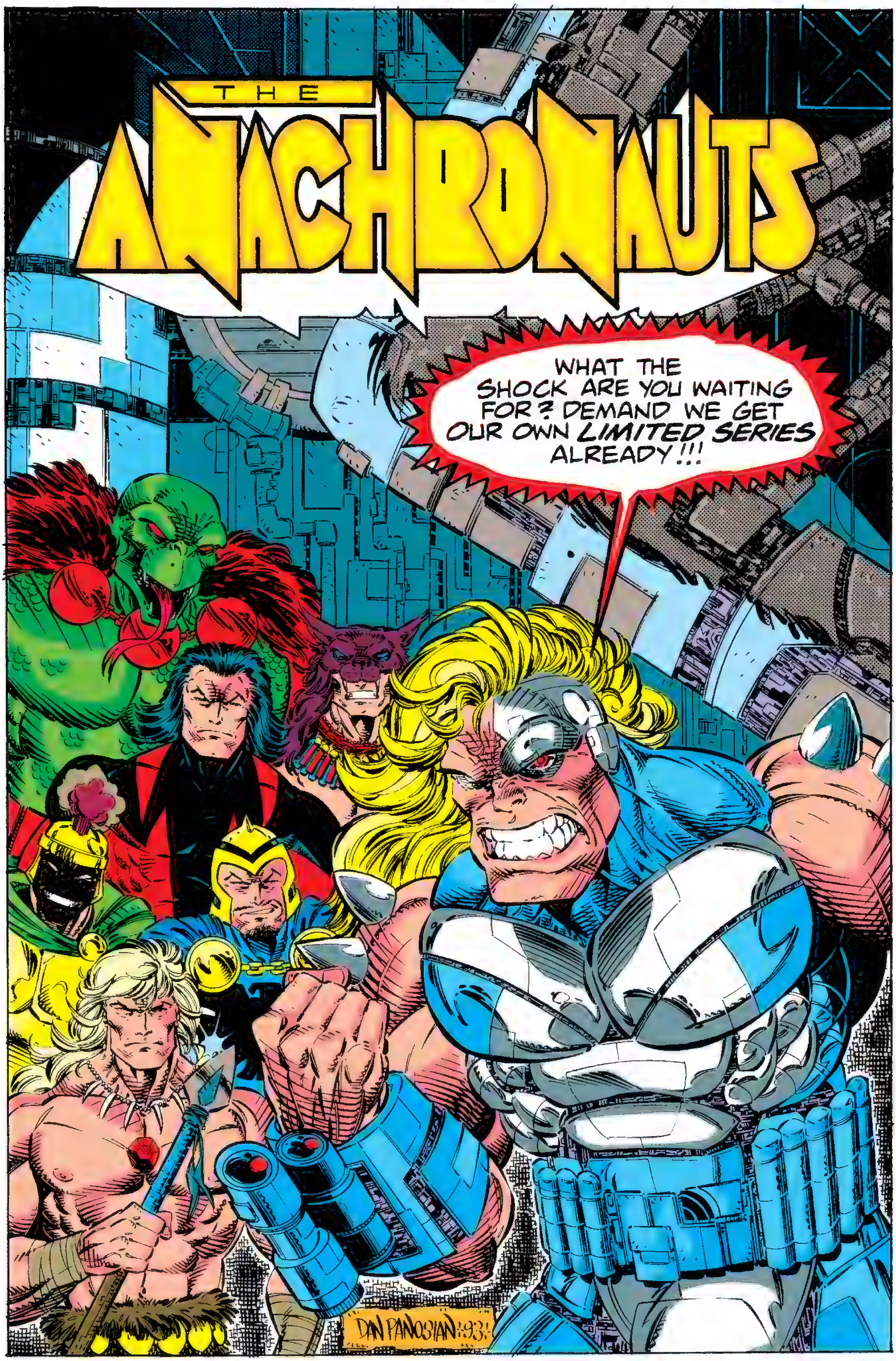

EPILOGUE:
NEW YORK.
BILL! HANK!
IS EVERYTHING ALL RIGHT?
EVERYTHING'S FINE, SERSI. THE STASIS FIELD IS HOLDING.
BY THE WAY, WHO WAS AT THE DOOR BEFORE?
THE DOOR--?
OH
THAT
THAT WAS NOTHING.
SHOULD I TELL JARVIS WE'RE READY FOR DINNER?
THE NIGHT AIR CARRIES WITH IT A HINT OF SPRING...
...BUT THE WATERS OF THE EAST RIVER RUN DEEP, COLD...
...AND DARK.
IT IS A PERFECT PLACE FOR THINGS TO BE CAST AWAY...
...AND FORGOTTEN.
AND SOMEWHERE AN ANCIENT VOICE ECHOES...
"...THE DANGER IS NOT YET OVER."

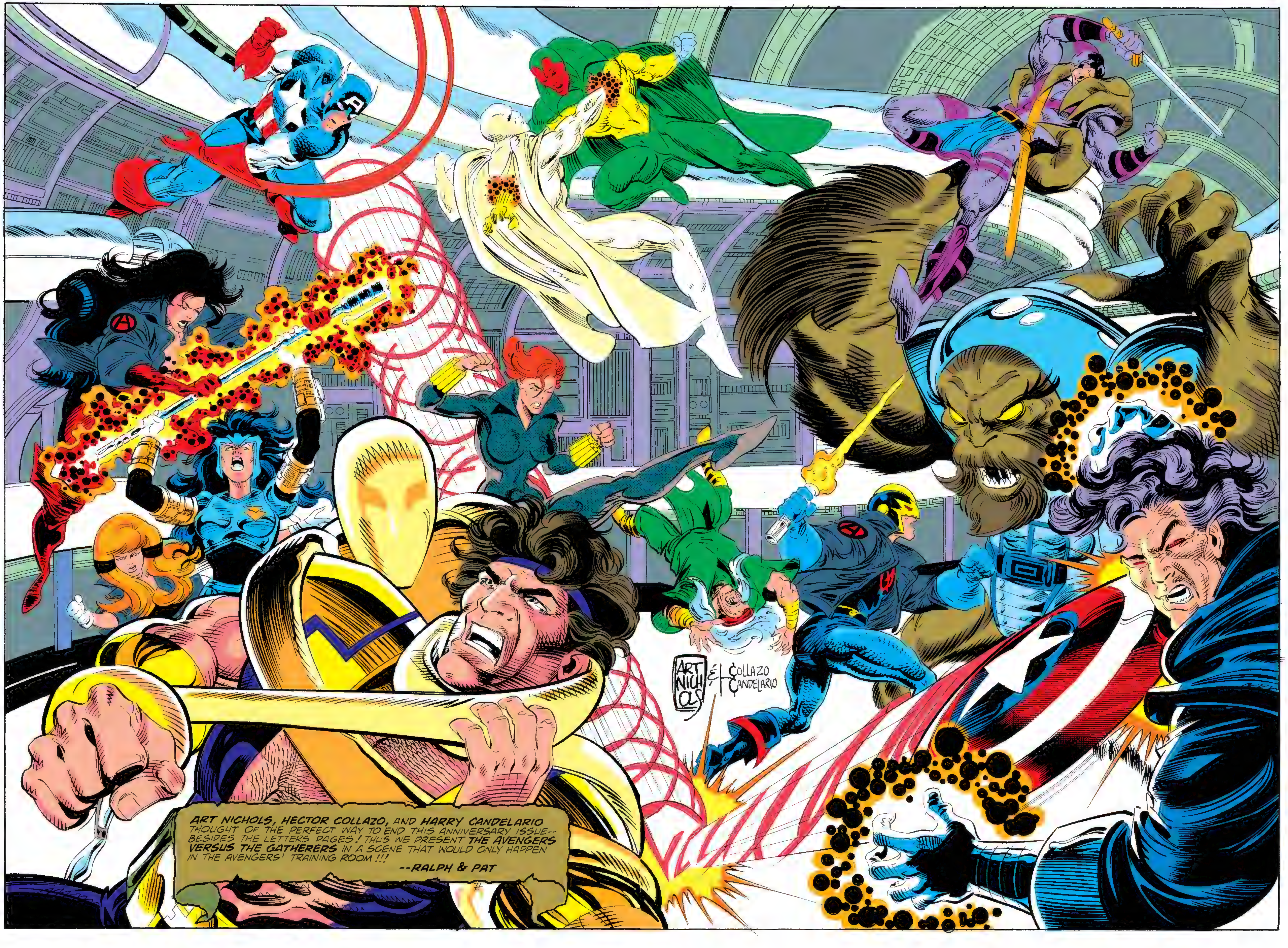
WE'VE STARTED OUR 30TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION WITH AN EXPLOSION OF NEW IDEAS, EXCITING VILLAINS, A DOUBLE-DOSE OF INTRIGUE, AND NOW WE'D LIKE TO ADD TO THE POT, THE TALENTS OF A FEW VERY EXCITING ARTISTS! AS ALWAYS, ENJOY!!! -- RALF AND PAT
ART NICHOLS 3-93
COLLAZO


BLOOD WRAITH
FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO HAVEN'T CHECKED OUT THIS YEAR'S AVENGERS ANNUAL, THEN YOU'VE MISSED THE CREATION OF THE ***BLOOD WRAITH!*** THE SINISTER NEW THREAT TO THE BLACK KNIGHT AND HIS COMPANIONS WILL BE MAKING HIS ***"REPRISE"*** APPEARANCE IN AVENGERS #366 -- THE SIXTY-FOUR PAGE ANNIVERSARY SPECTACULAR!! WHEN DANE GOES ON THE HUNT FOR THE EBONY BLADE AND ITS NEW OWNER, HE FINDS THAT HE ISN'T THE ONLY ONE WHO WANTS TO GET HIS HANDS ON HIS FORMER WEAPON -- ***ENTER DEADPOOL!!!*** -- RALF AND PAT

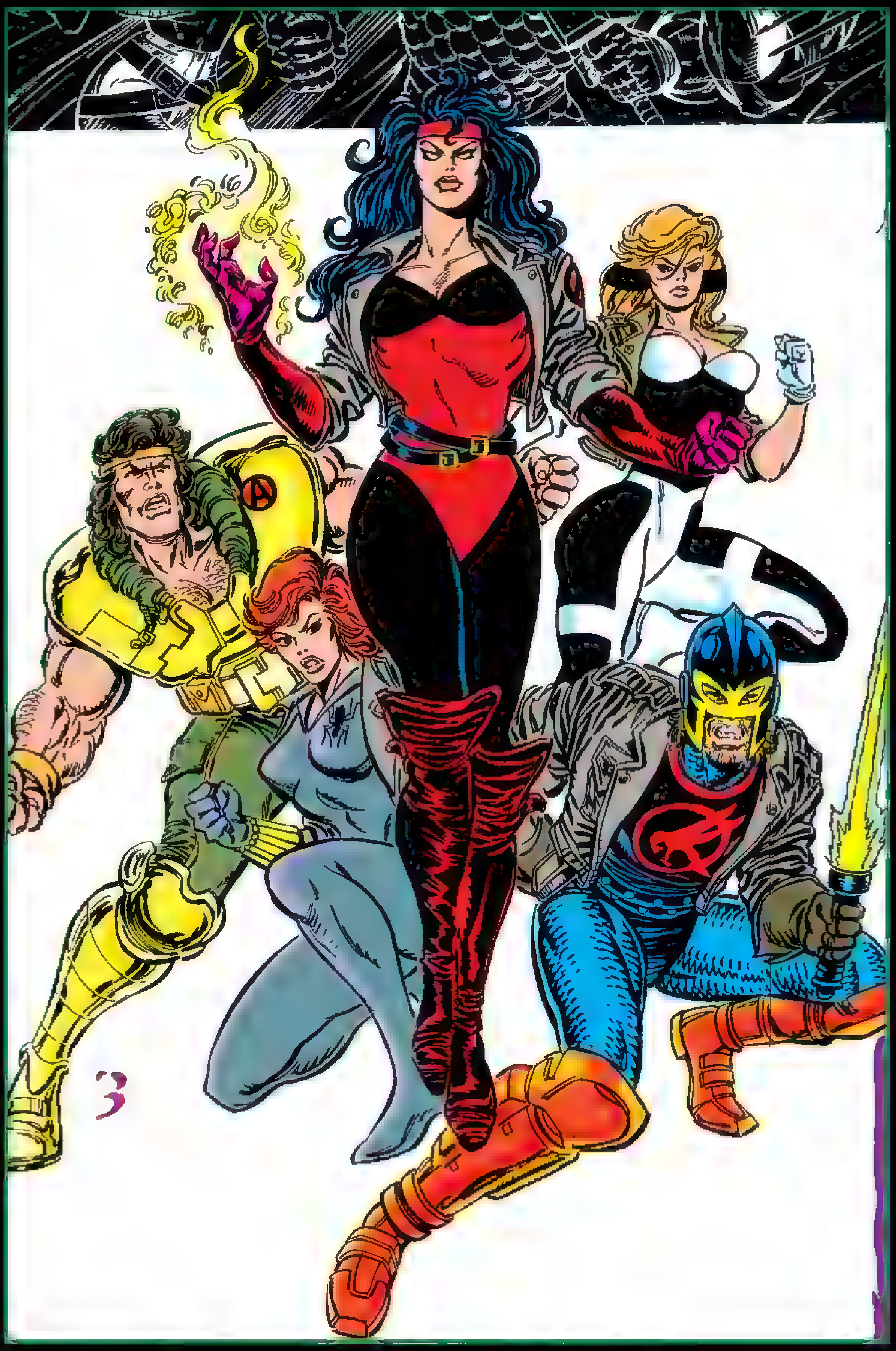
THE GATHERERS


SERSI
BRIAN PELLETIER
TOM PALMER
12 • 1 7 9 2
OBVIOUSLY SERSI'S PRESENCE IN THE AVENGERS HAS ALWAYS BEEN QUESTIONED, BUT NOW THAT SHE APPEARS TO BE A THREAT TO THOSE AROUND HER, WHAT MEASURES WILL BE TAKEN TO PREVENT HER TOTAL LOSS OF CONTROL ? *WHATEVER THE COST, WILL THE AVENGERS CONTINUE TO PROTECT THE ETERNAL WHO WILL CAUSE THE END OF THEIR OWN WORLD !?!* -- RALF AND PAT

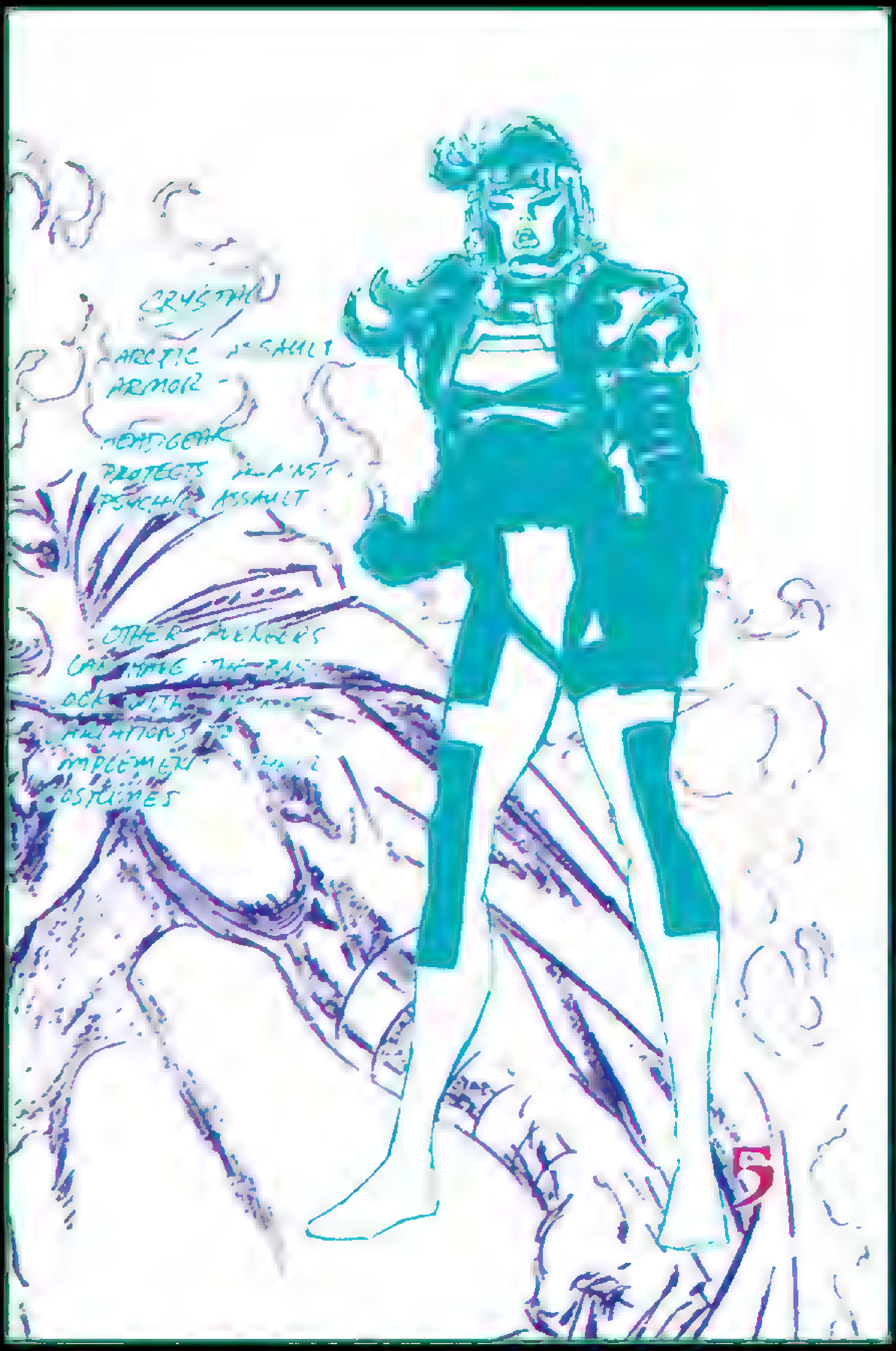

THE ANACHRONAUTS
WHAT THE SHOCK ARE YOU WAITING FOR? DEMAND WE GET OUR OWN *LIMITED SERIES* ALREADY!!!
DAN PANOSIAN '93


ART NICHOLS, HECTOR COLLAZO, AND HARRY CANDELARIO THOUGHT OF THE PERFECT WAY TO END THIS ANNIVERSARY ISSUE-- BESIDES THE LETTERS PAGES! THUS WE PRESENT THE AVENGERS VERSUS THE GATHERERS IN A SCENE THAT WOULD ONLY HAPPEN IN THE AVENGERS' TRAINING ROOM!!!
--RALPH & PAT
ART NICHOLS & COLLAZO CANDELARIO

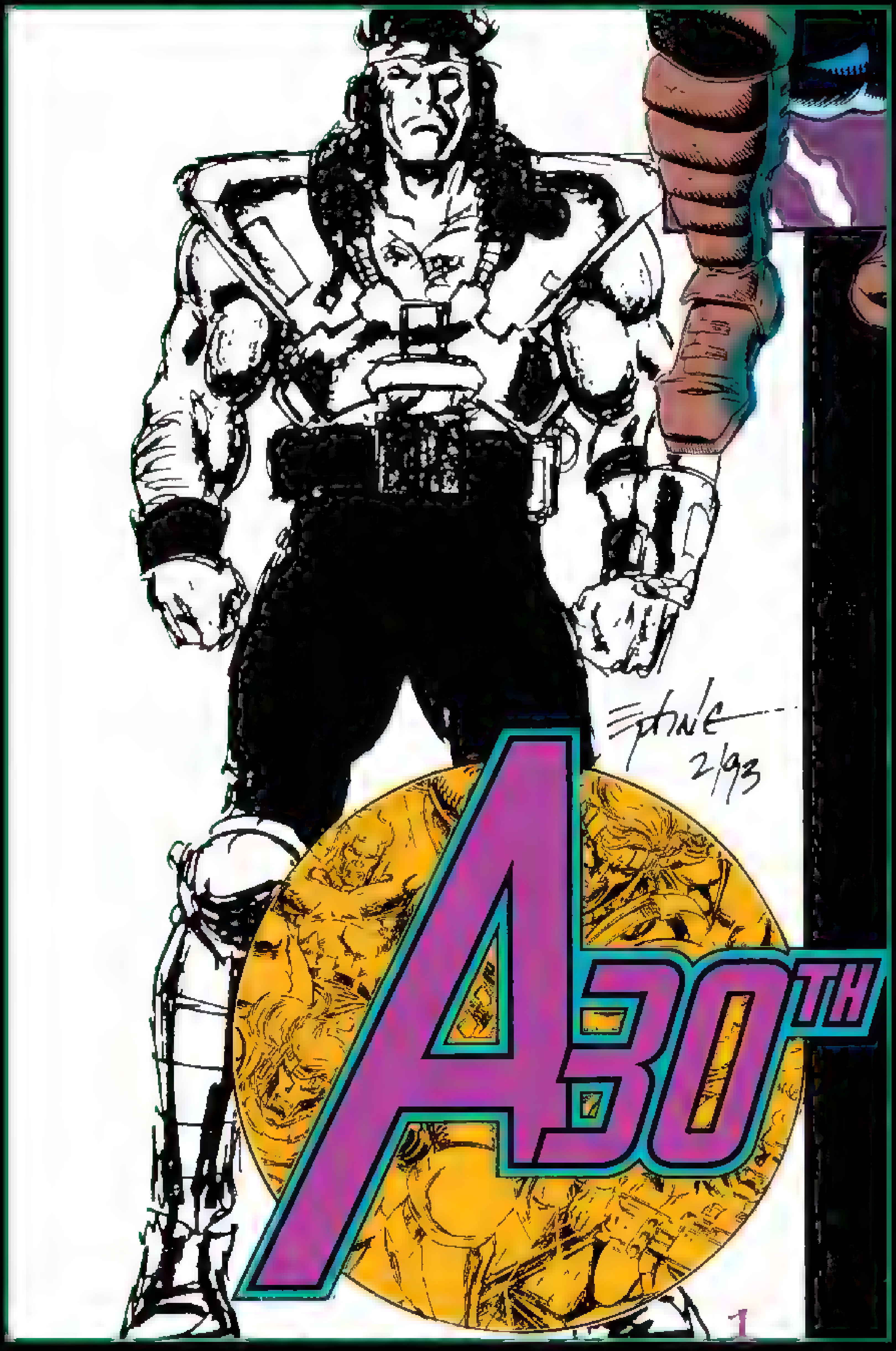
APPEARING FROM THE SHADOWS THAT SEPARATE ALTERNATE REALITIES FROM EARTH PRIME, **THE GATHERERS** HAVE BEEN BROUGHT TOGETHER BY THE MYSTERIOUS ENIGMA KNOWN AS **PROCTOR**, MERGED WITH THEIR MIRROR-LIKE COUNTER-PARTS, AND DIRECTED TOWARDS THE ULTIMATE ANNIHILATION OF THE AVENGERS. WHAT HAPPENED TO EACH OF THEIR WORLDS THAT COULD CAUSE THEM TO HATE OUR BELOVED AVENGERS? WHAT ACTS OF VIOLENCE AND CHAOS FUEL THEIR DESIRES OF DEATH AND DESTRUCTION? **WHAT DOOM LIES AHEAD ON EARTH PRIME SHOULD THEIR DESPERATE ACTS FAIL?**



AVENGERS #366 COVER ART
BY STEVE EPTING & TOM PALMER


CRYSTAL
ARCTIC ASSAULT ARMOR
HEADGEAR PROTECTS AGAINST PSYCHIC ASSAULT
OTHER AVENGERS CAN HAVE THE BASIC LOOK WITH VARIATIONS TO IMPLEMENT THEIR COSTUMES
5

CRYSTAL UPDATED COSTUME SKETCH
BY STEVE EPTING


Epting
2/93
A 30TH
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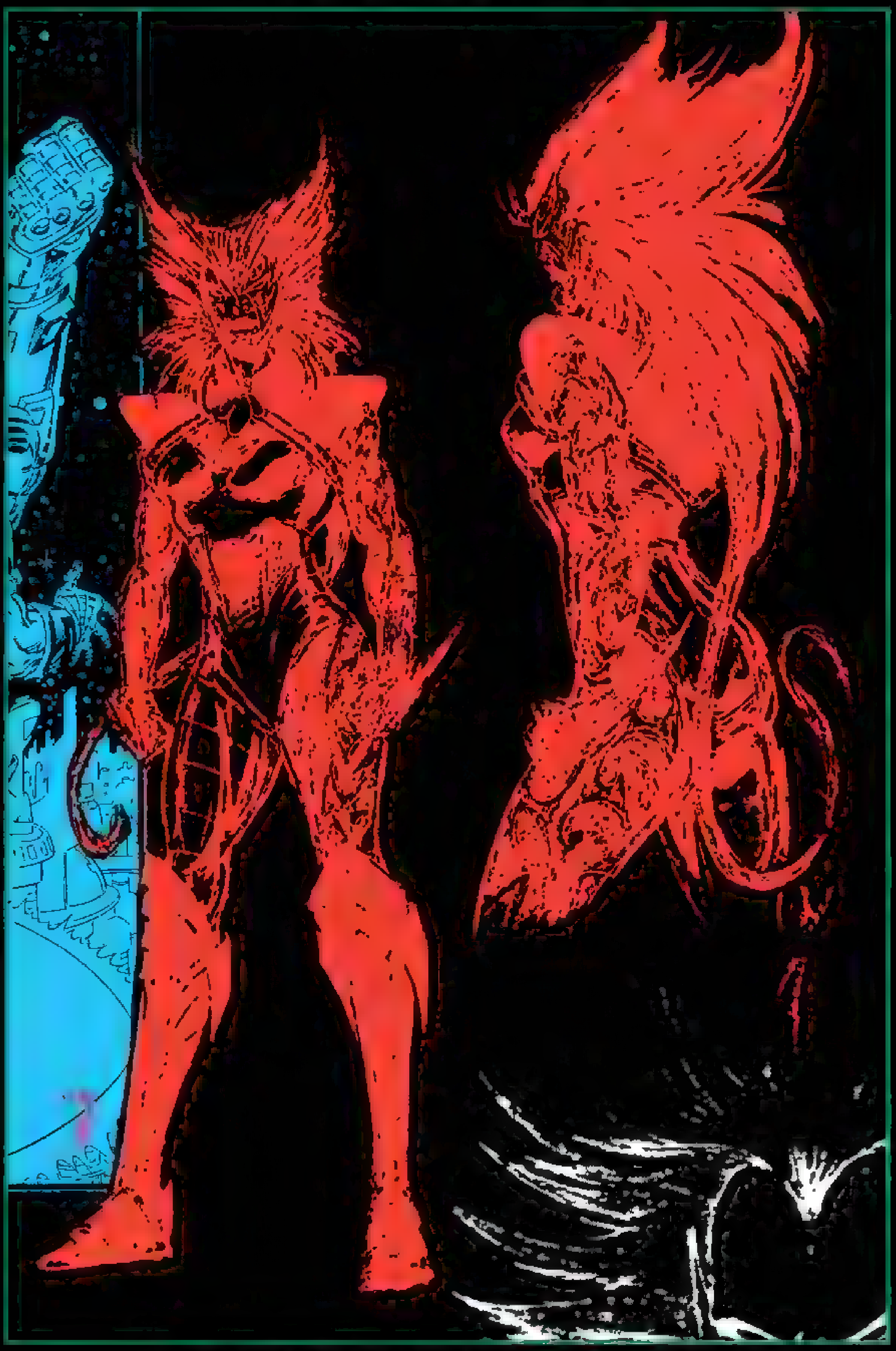
HERCULES UPDATED COSTUME SKETCH
BY STEVE EPTING



DEATHCRY CHARACTER SKETCHES
BY STEVE EPTING

MARVEL COMICS
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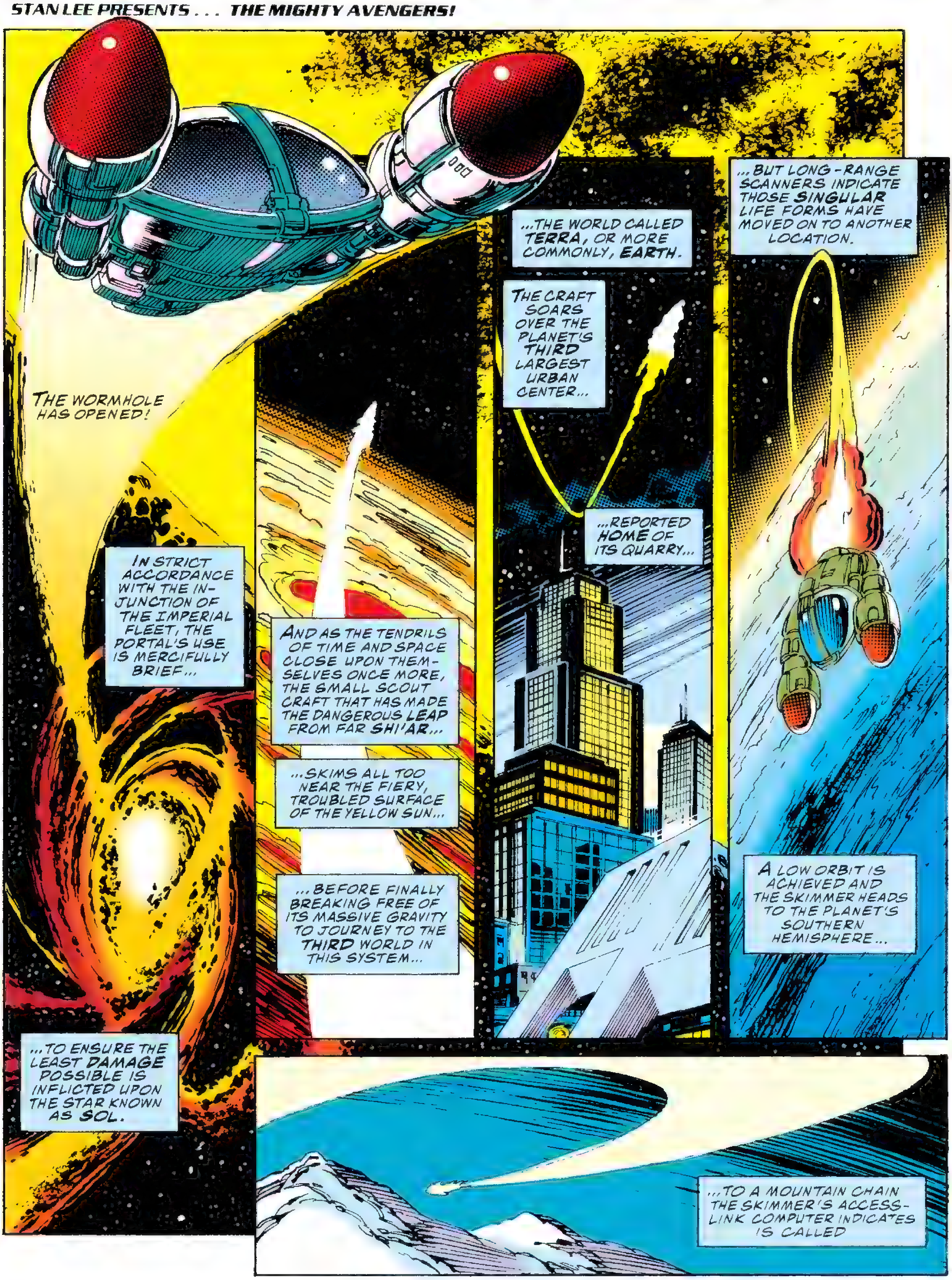
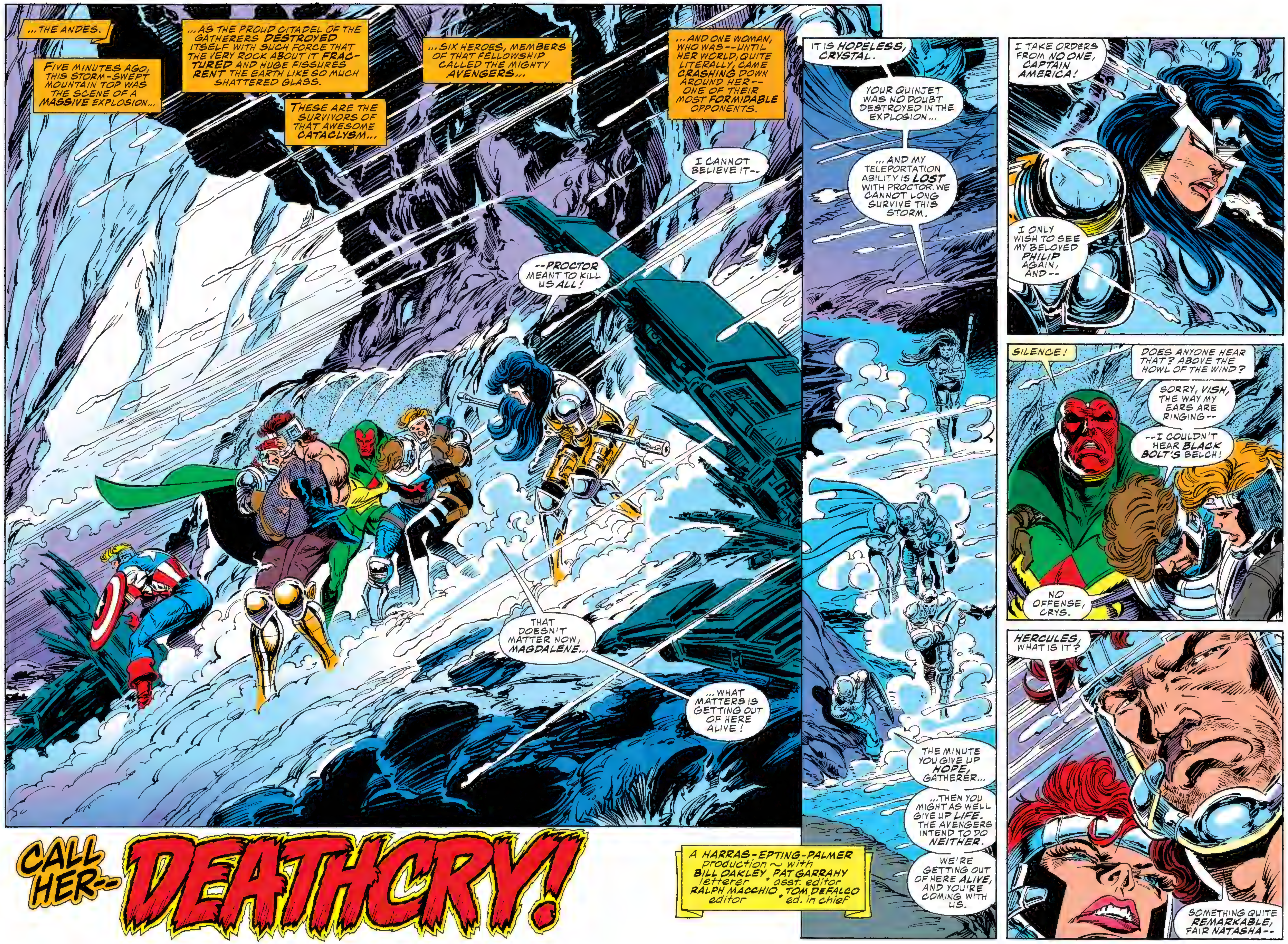
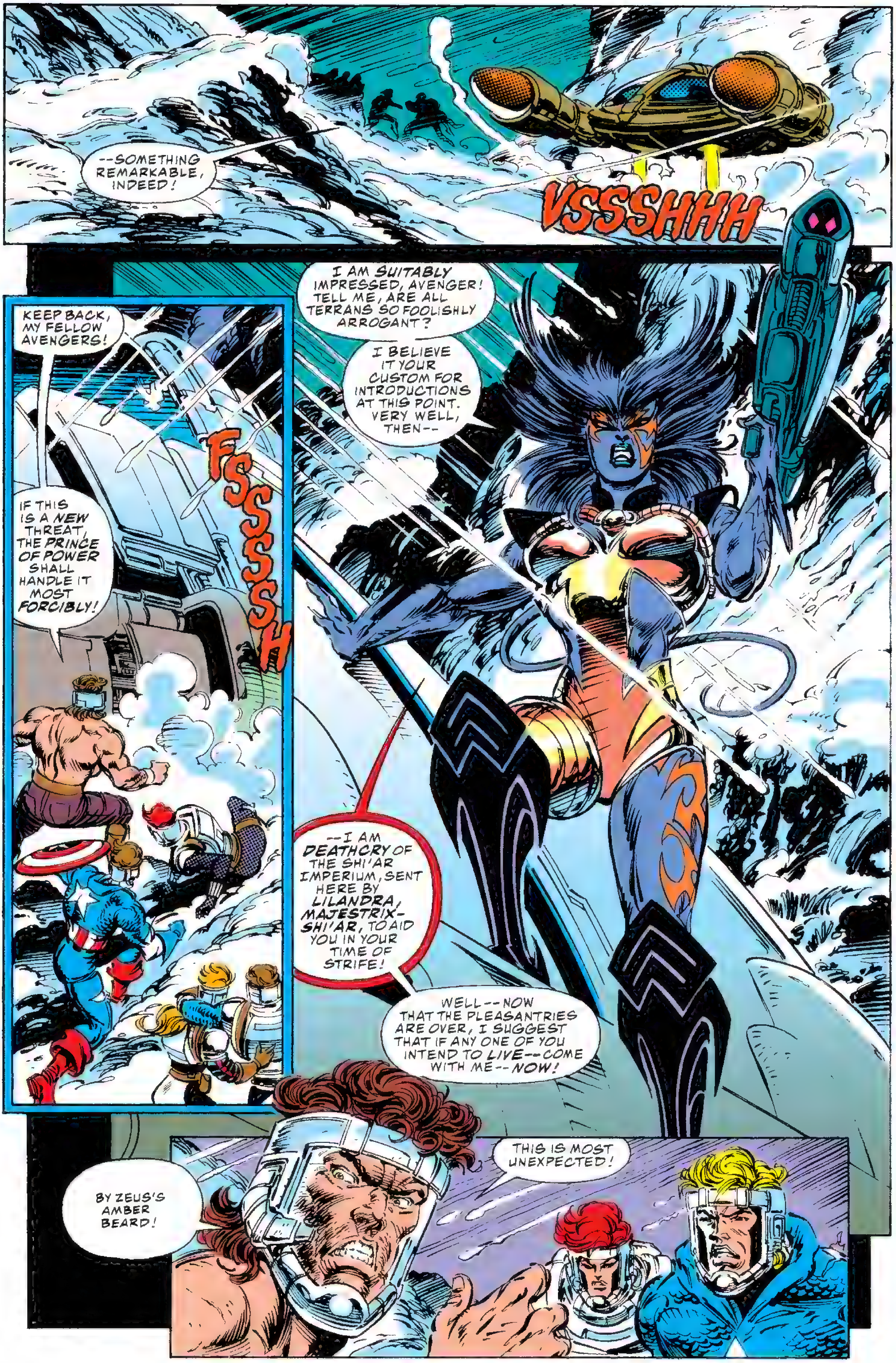
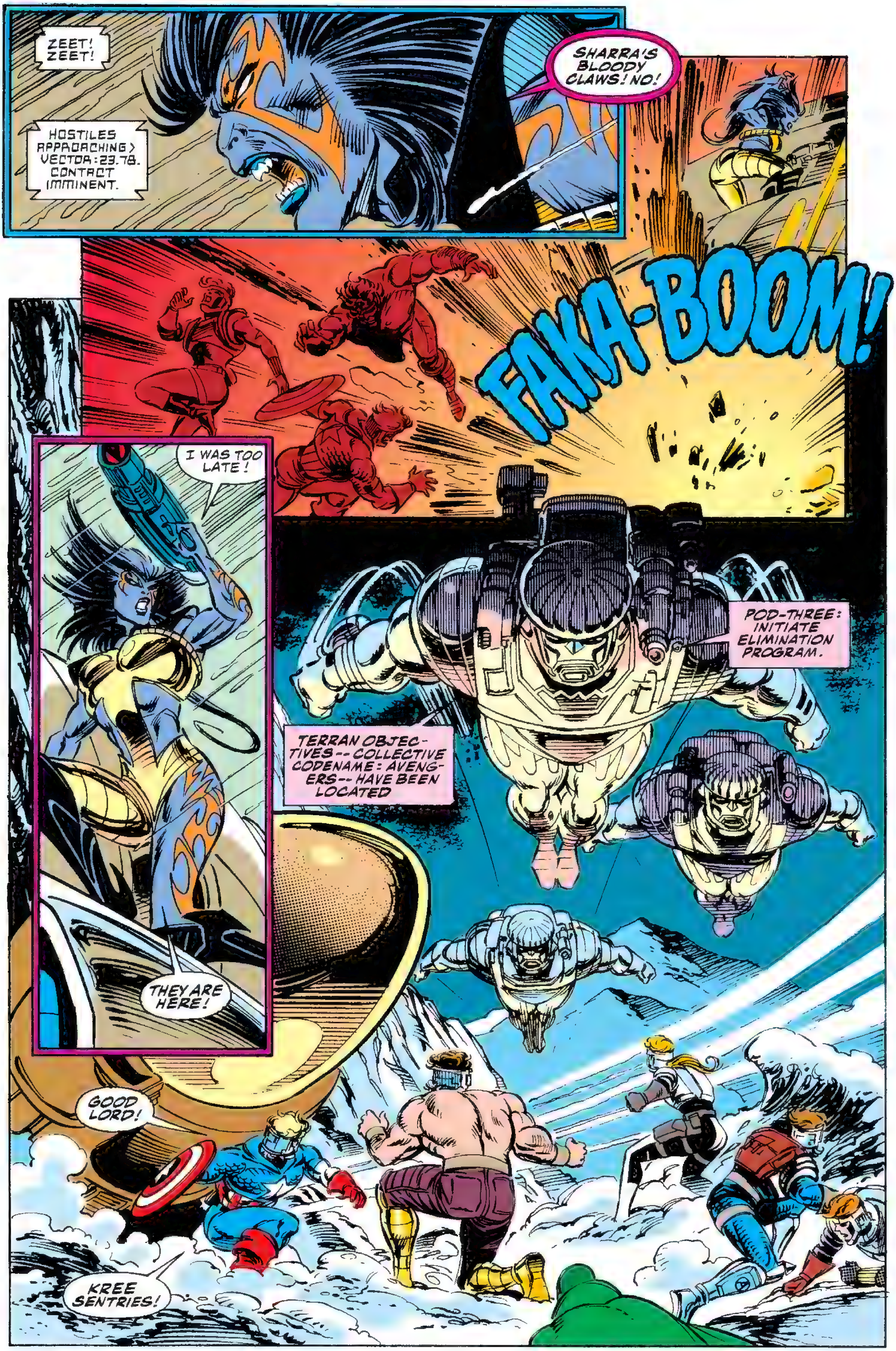
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
CONTINUING THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF THE
AVENGERS®
ENTER DEATHCRY
EPTING • PALMER

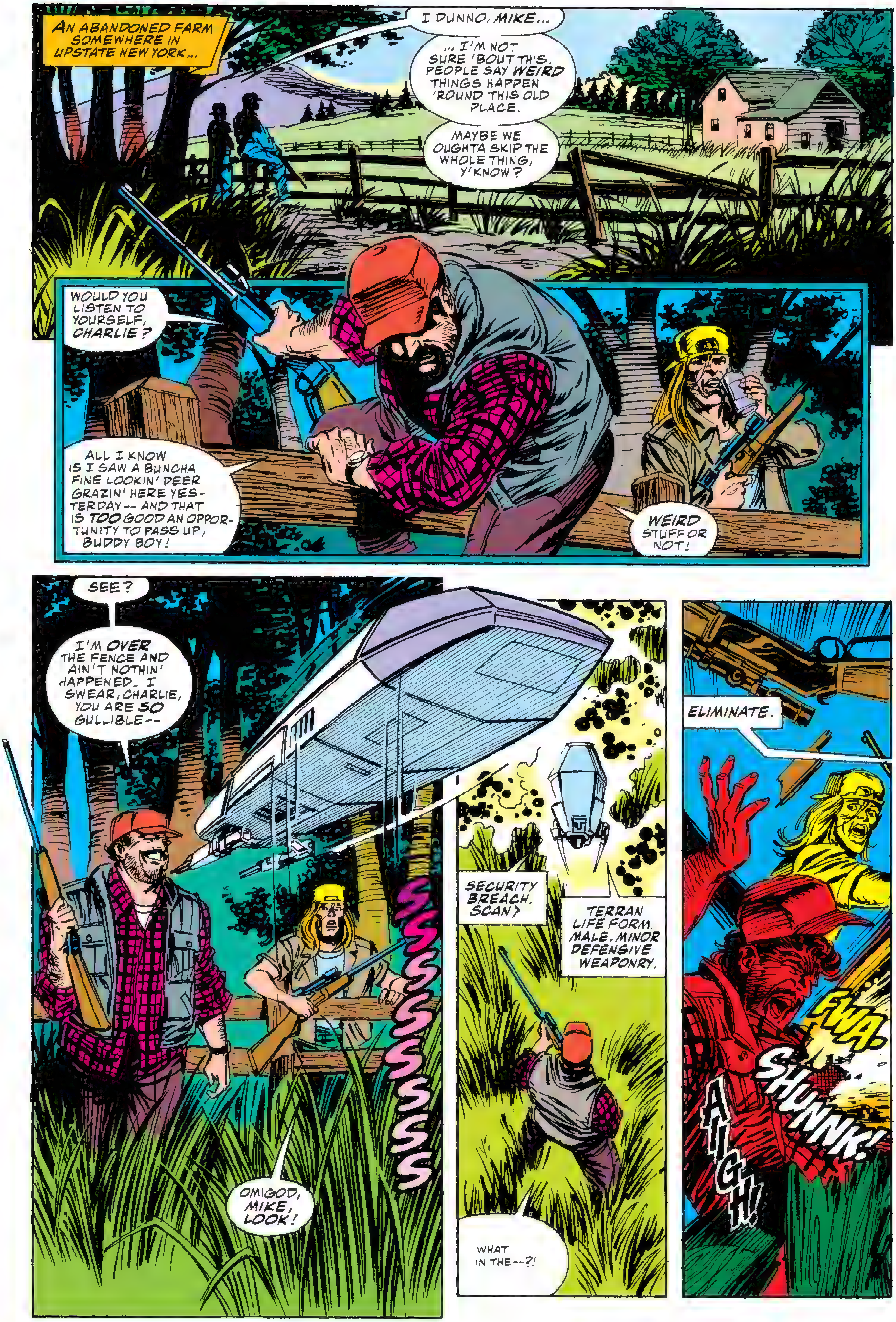
TO COMBAT THOSE THREATS WHICH NO SINGLE HERO CAN STAND AGAINST, EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES HAVE FORGED A COVENANT TO UNITE IN BATTLE FOR THE PROTECTION OF ALL MANKIND! STAN LEE PRESENTS . . . THE MIGHTY AVENGERS!

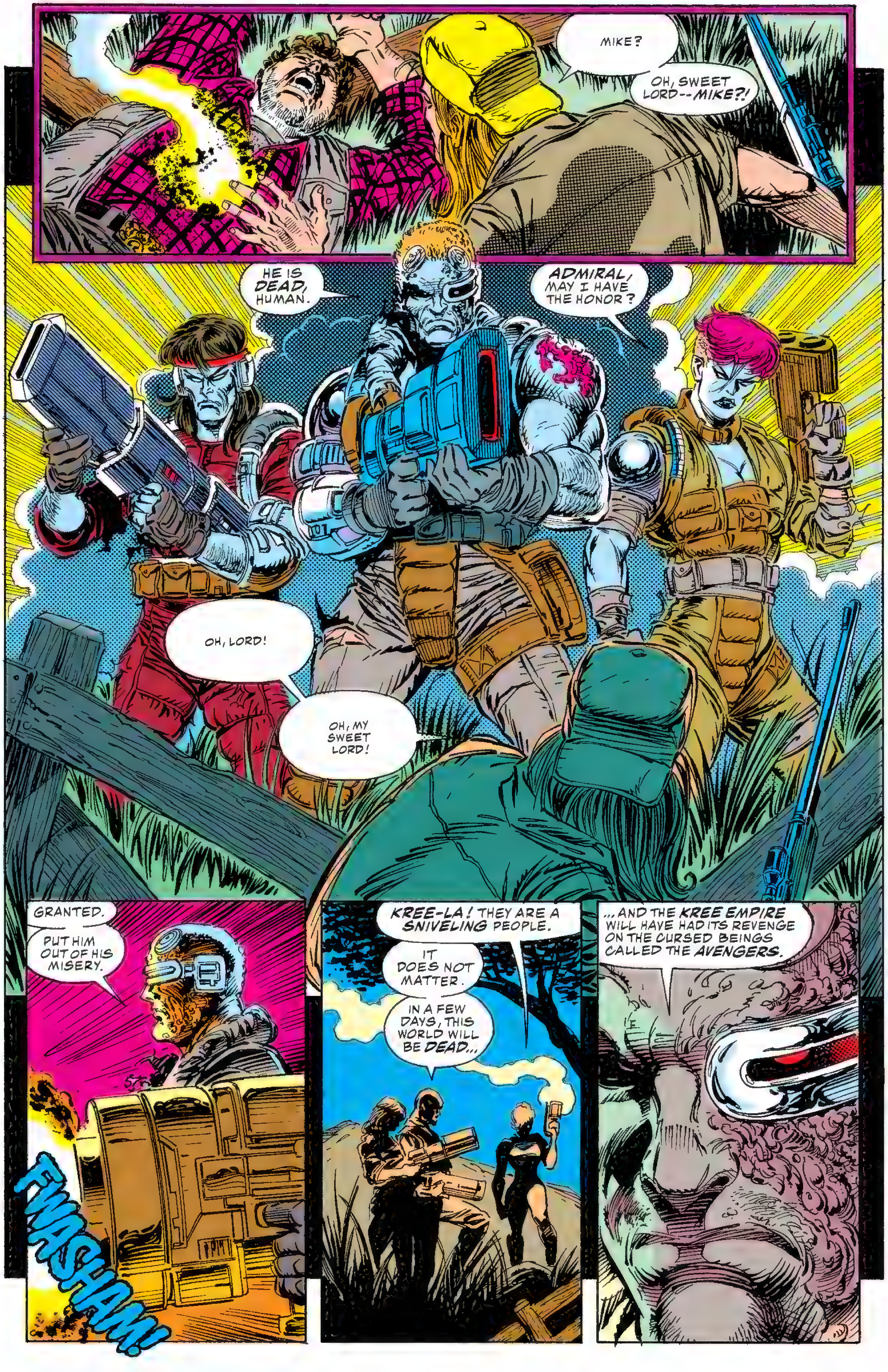

THE WORMHOLE HAS OPENED!
IN STRICT ACCORDANCE WITH THE INJUNCTION OF THE IMPERIAL FLEET, THE PORTAL'S USE IS MERCIFULLY BRIEF...
...TO ENSURE THE LEAST DAMAGE POSSIBLE IS INFLICTED UPON THE STAR KNOWN AS SOL.
AND AS THE TENDRILS OF TIME AND SPACE CLOSE UPON THEMSELVES ONCE MORE, THE SMALL SCOUT CRAFT THAT HAS MADE THE DANGEROUS LEAP FROM FAR SHI'AR...
...SKIMS ALL TOO NEAR THE FIERY, TROUBLED SURFACE OF THE YELLOW SUN...
...BEFORE FINALLY BREAKING FREE OF ITS MASSIVE GRAVITY TO JOURNEY TO THE THIRD WORLD IN THIS SYSTEM...
...THE WORLD CALLED TERRA, OR MORE COMMONLY, EARTH.
THE CRAFT SOARS OVER THE PLANET'S THIRD LARGEST URBAN CENTER...
...REPORTED HOME OF ITS QUARRY...
...BUT LONG-RANGE SCANNERS INDICATE THOSE SINGULAR LIFE FORMS HAVE MOVED ON TO ANOTHER LOCATION.
A LOW ORBIT IS ACHIEVED AND THE SKIMMER HEADS TO THE PLANET'S SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE...
...TO A MOUNTAIN CHAIN THE SKIMMER'S ACCESS-LINK COMPUTER INDICATES IS CALLED

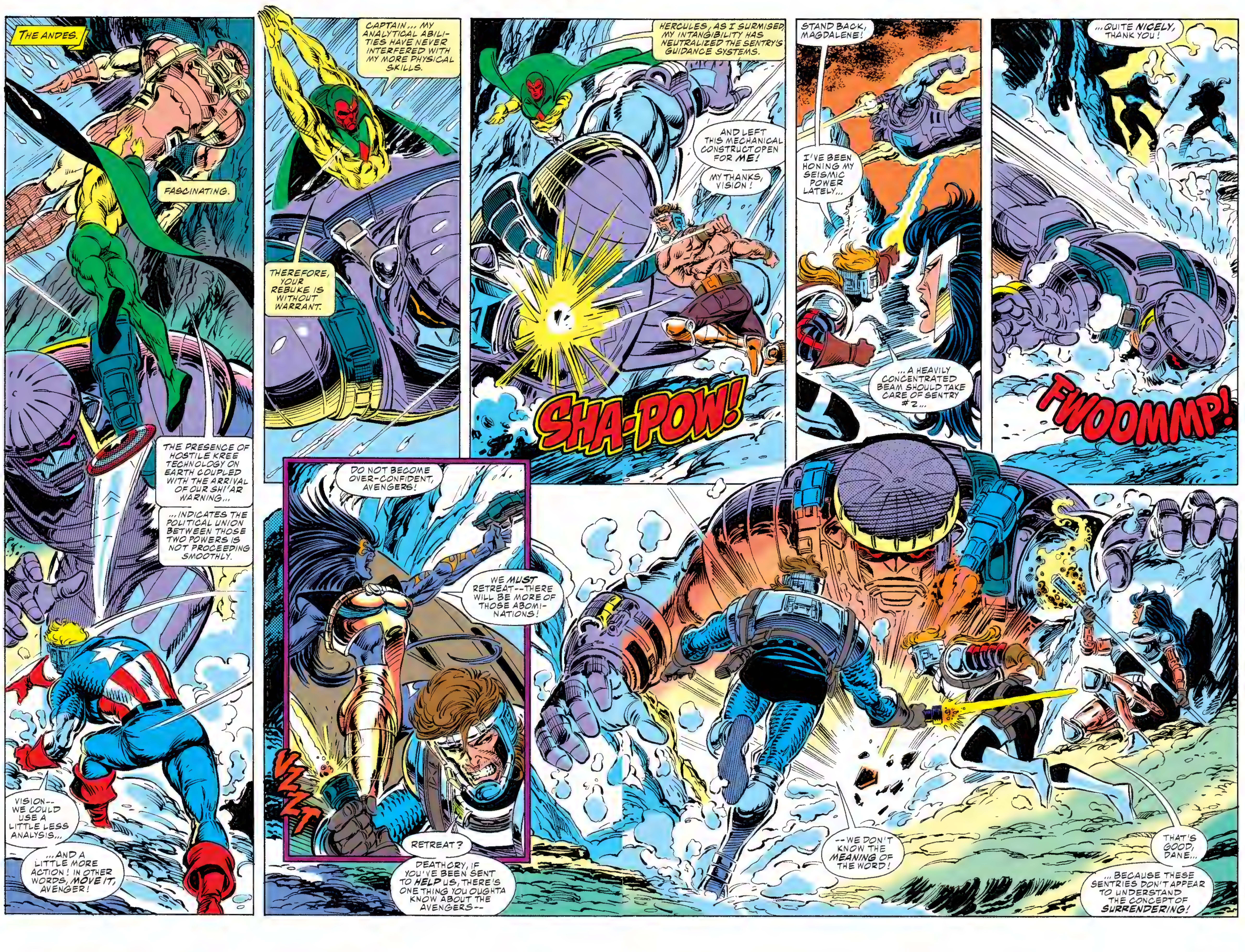

...THE ANDES.
FIVE MINUTES AGO, THIS STORM-SWEPT MOUNTAIN TOP WAS THE SCENE OF A MASSIVE EXPLOSION...
...AS THE PROUD CITADEL OF THE GATHERERS DESTROYED ITSELF WITH SUCH FORCE THAT THE VERY ROCK ABOUT IT FRACTURED AND HUGE FISSURES RENT THE EARTH LIKE SO MUCH SHATTERED GLASS.
THESE ARE THE SURVIVORS OF THAT AWESOME CATACLYSM...
...SIX HEROES, MEMBERS OF THAT FELLOWSHIP CALLED THE MIGHTY AVENGERS...
...AND ONE WOMAN, WHO WAS--UNTIL HER WORLD, QUITE LITERALLY, CAME CRASHING DOWN AROUND HER--ONE OF THEIR MOST FORMIDABLE OPPONENTS.
I CANNOT BELIEVE IT--
--PROCTOR MEANT TO KILL US ALL!
THAT DOESN'T MATTER NOW, MAGDALENE...
...WHAT MATTERS IS GETTING OUT OF HERE ALIVE!
IT IS HOPELESS, CRYSTAL.
YOUR QUINJET WAS NO DOUBT DESTROYED IN THE EXPLOSION...
...AND MY TELEPORTATION ABILITY IS LOST WITH PROCTOR. WE CANNOT LONG SURVIVE THIS STORM.
THE MINUTE YOU GIVE UP HOPE, GATHERER...
...THEN YOU MIGHT AS WELL GIVE UP LIFE. THE AVENGERS INTEND TO DO NEITHER.
WE'RE GETTING OUT OF HERE ALIVE, AND YOU'RE COMING WITH US.
I TAKE ORDERS FROM NO ONE, CAPTAIN AMERICA!
I ONLY WISH TO SEE MY BELOVED PHILIP AGAIN, AND--
SILENCE!
DOES ANYONE HEAR THAT? ABOVE THE HOWL OF THE WIND?
SORRY, VISH, THE WAY MY EARS ARE RINGING--
--I COULDN'T HEAR BLACK BOLT'S BELCH!
NO OFFENSE, CRYS.
HERCULES, WHAT IS IT?
SOMETHING QUITE REMARKABLE, FAIR NATASHA--
CALL HER--DEATHCRY!
A HARRAS-EPTING-PALMER production ~ with
BILL OAKLEY letterer • PAT GARRAHY asst. editor
RALPH MACCHIO editor • TOM DEFALCO ed. in chief

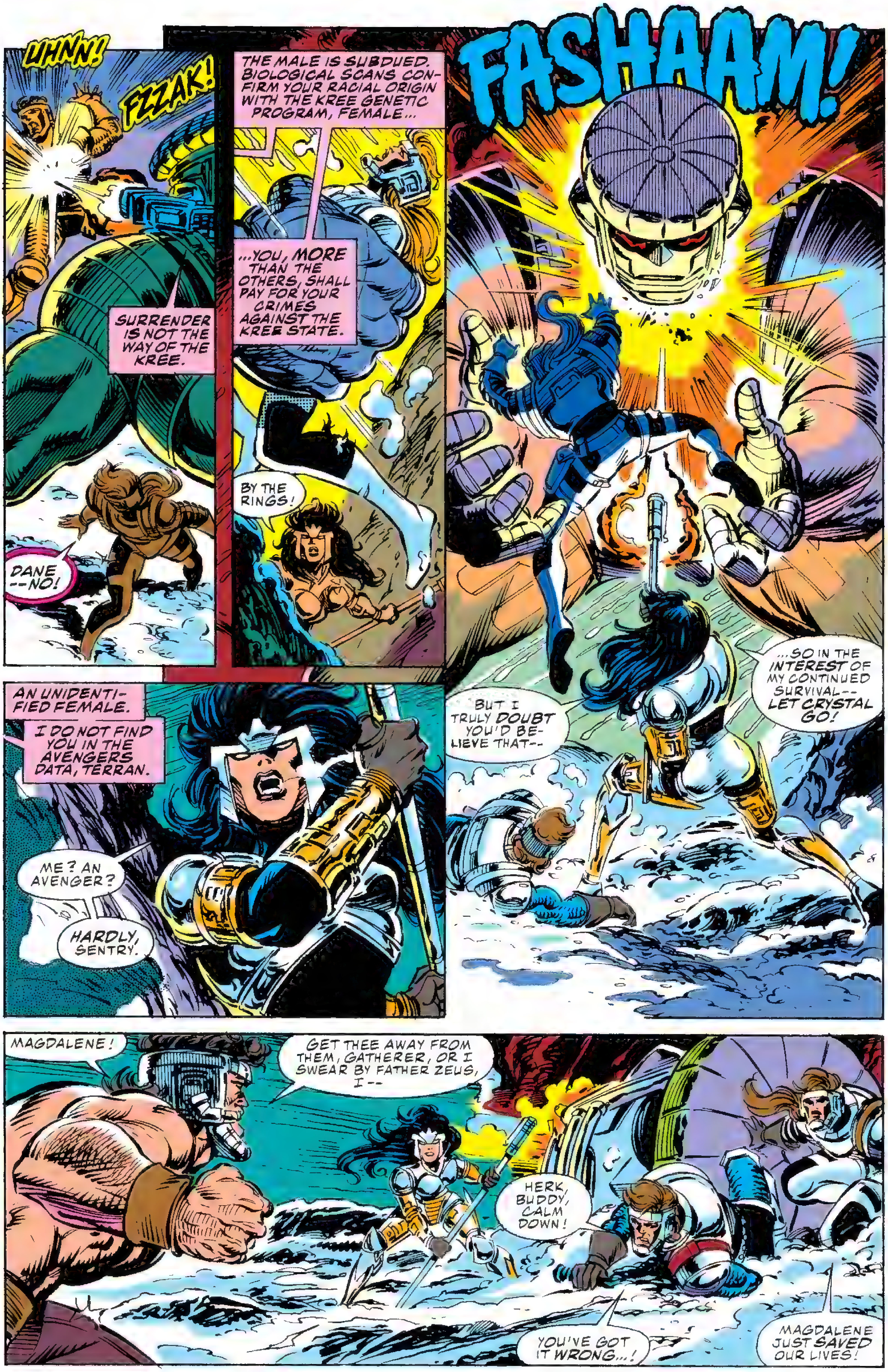

--SOMETHING REMARKABLE, INDEED!
VSSSHHH
KEEP BACK, MY FELLOW AVENGERS!
IF THIS IS A *NEW* THREAT, THE *PRINCE OF POWER* SHALL HANDLE IT MOST *FORCIBLY!*
FSSSSH
I AM *SUITABLY* IMPRESSED, AVENGER! TELL ME, ARE ALL TERRANS SO FOOLISHLY ARROGANT?
I BELIEVE IT YOUR CUSTOM FOR INTRODUCTIONS AT THIS POINT. VERY WELL, THEN--
--I AM *DEATHCRY* OF THE SHI'AR IMPERIUM, SENT HERE BY *LILANDRA, MAJESTRIX-SHI'AR,* TO AID YOU IN YOUR TIME OF STRIFE!
WELL--NOW THAT THE PLEASANTRIES ARE OVER, I SUGGEST THAT IF ANY ONE OF YOU INTEND TO *LIVE*--COME WITH ME--*NOW!*
BY ZEUS'S AMBER BEARD!
THIS IS MOST UNEXPECTED!

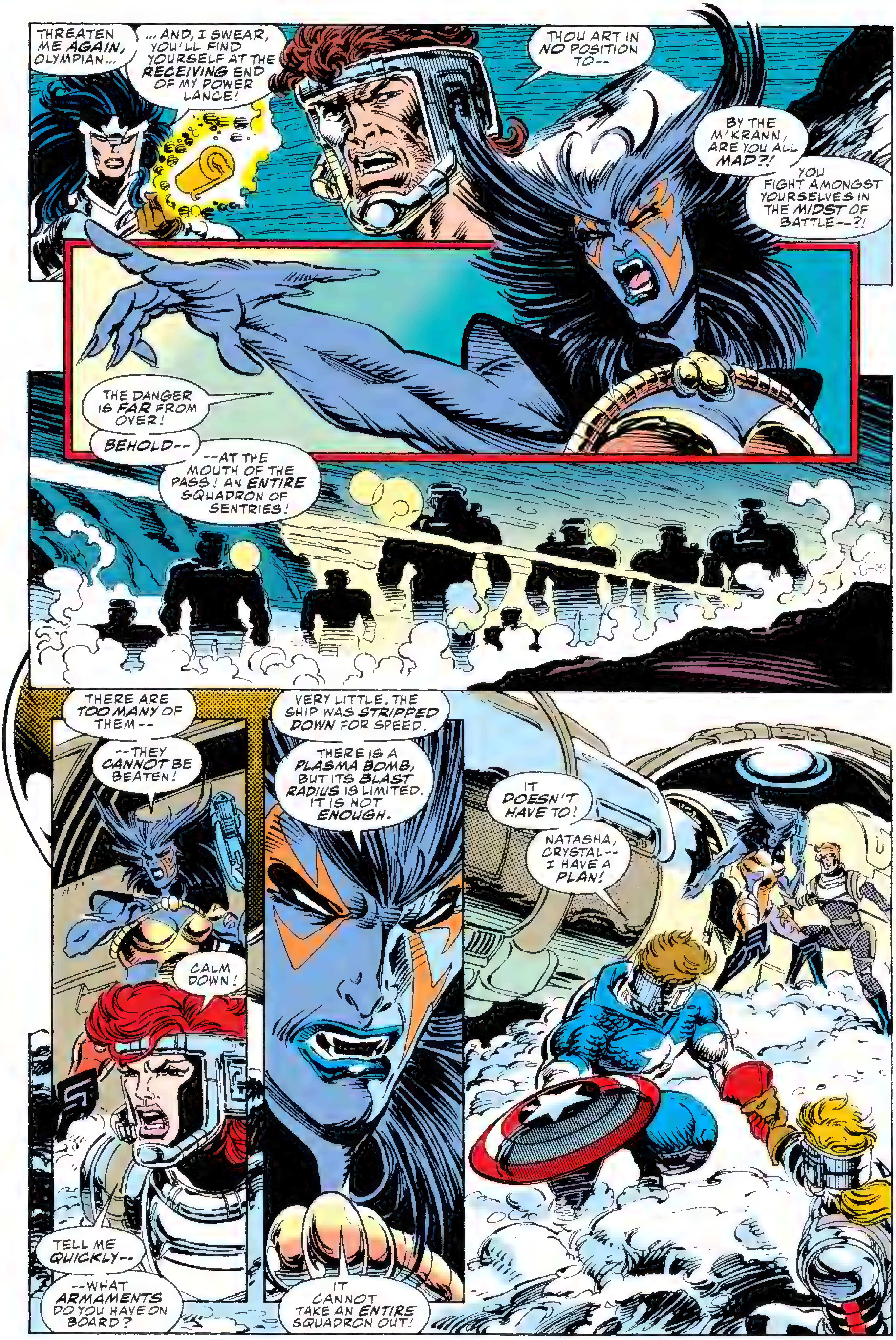

ZEET! ZEET!
HOSTILES APPROACHING > VECTOR: 23.78. CONTACT IMMINENT.
SHARRA'S BLOODY CLAWS! NO!
FAKA-BOOM!
I WAS TOO LATE!
THEY ARE HERE!
TERRAN OBJECTIVES -- COLLECTIVE CODENAME: AVENGERS -- HAVE BEEN LOCATED
POD-THREE: INITIATE ELIMINATION PROGRAM.
GOOD LORD!
KREE SENTRIES!


AN ABANDONED FARM SOMEWHERE IN UPSTATE NEW YORK...
I DUNNO, MIKE...
...I'M NOT SURE 'BOUT THIS. PEOPLE SAY WEIRD THINGS HAPPEN 'ROUND THIS OLD PLACE.
MAYBE WE OUGHTA SKIP THE WHOLE THING, Y'KNOW?
WOULD YOU LISTEN TO YOURSELF, CHARLIE?
ALL I KNOW IS I SAW A BUNCHA FINE LOOKIN' DEER GRAZIN' HERE YESTERDAY -- AND THAT IS TOO GOOD AN OPPORTUNITY TO PASS UP, BUDDY BOY!
WEIRD STUFF OR NOT!
SEE?
I'M OVER THE FENCE AND AIN'T NOTHIN' HAPPENED. I SWEAR, CHARLIE, YOU ARE SO GULLIBLE --
SSSSSSSSSSS
OMIGOD, MIKE, LOOK!
SECURITY BREACH. SCAN>
TERRAN LIFE FORM. MALE. MINOR DEFENSIVE WEAPONRY.
WHAT IN THE --?!
ELIMINATE.
FWA-SHUNNK!
AIIGH!

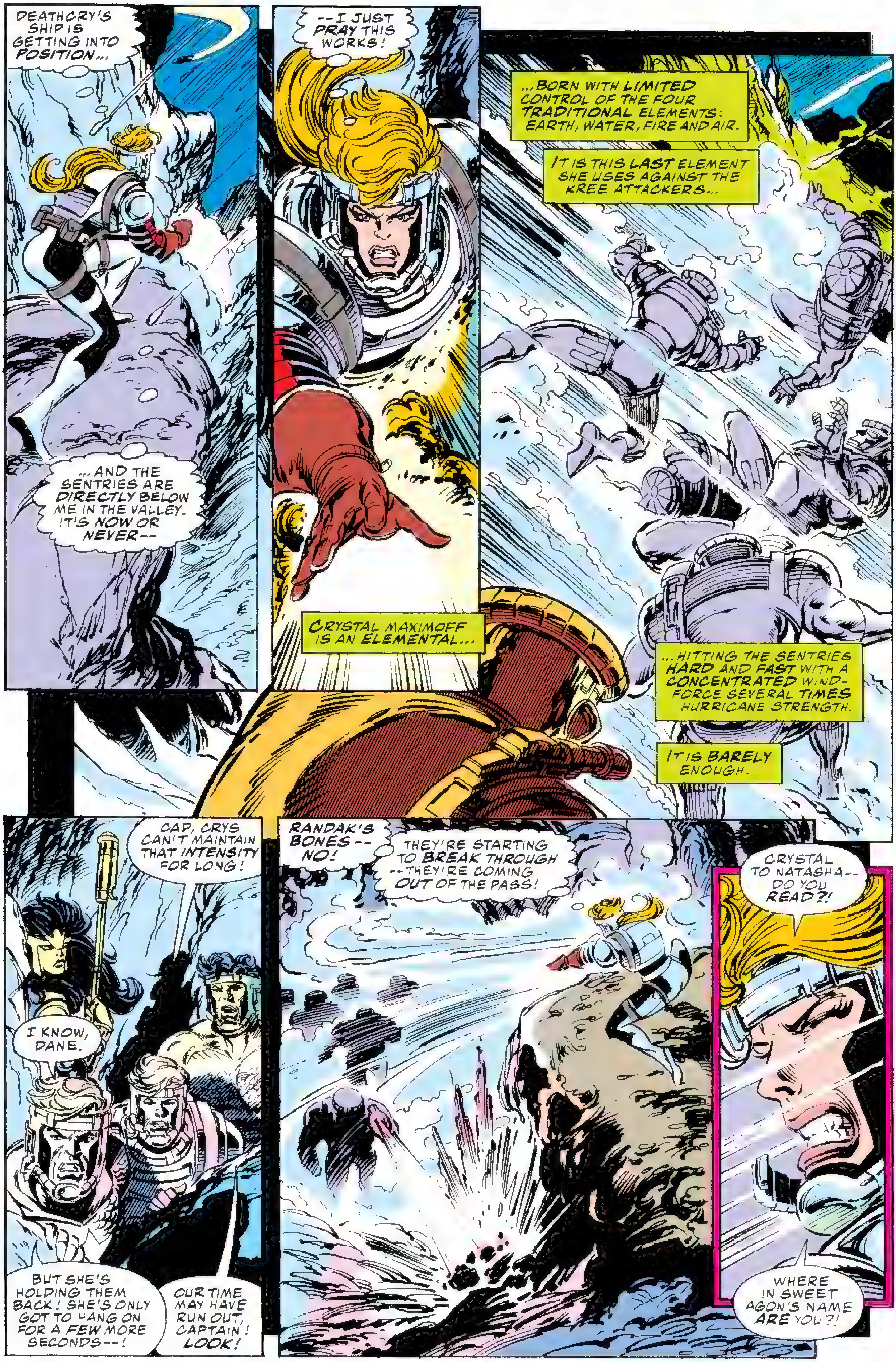

MIKE?
OH, SWEET LORD--MIKE?!
HE IS DEAD, HUMAN.
ADMIRAL, MAY I HAVE THE HONOR?
OH, LORD!
OH, MY SWEET LORD!
GRANTED.
PUT HIM OUT OF HIS MISERY.
FWASHAM!
KREE-LA! THEY ARE A SNIVELING PEOPLE.
IT DOES NOT MATTER.
IN A FEW DAYS, THIS WORLD WILL BE DEAD...
...AND THE KREE EMPIRE WILL HAVE HAD ITS REVENGE ON THE CURSED BEINGS CALLED THE AVENGERS.

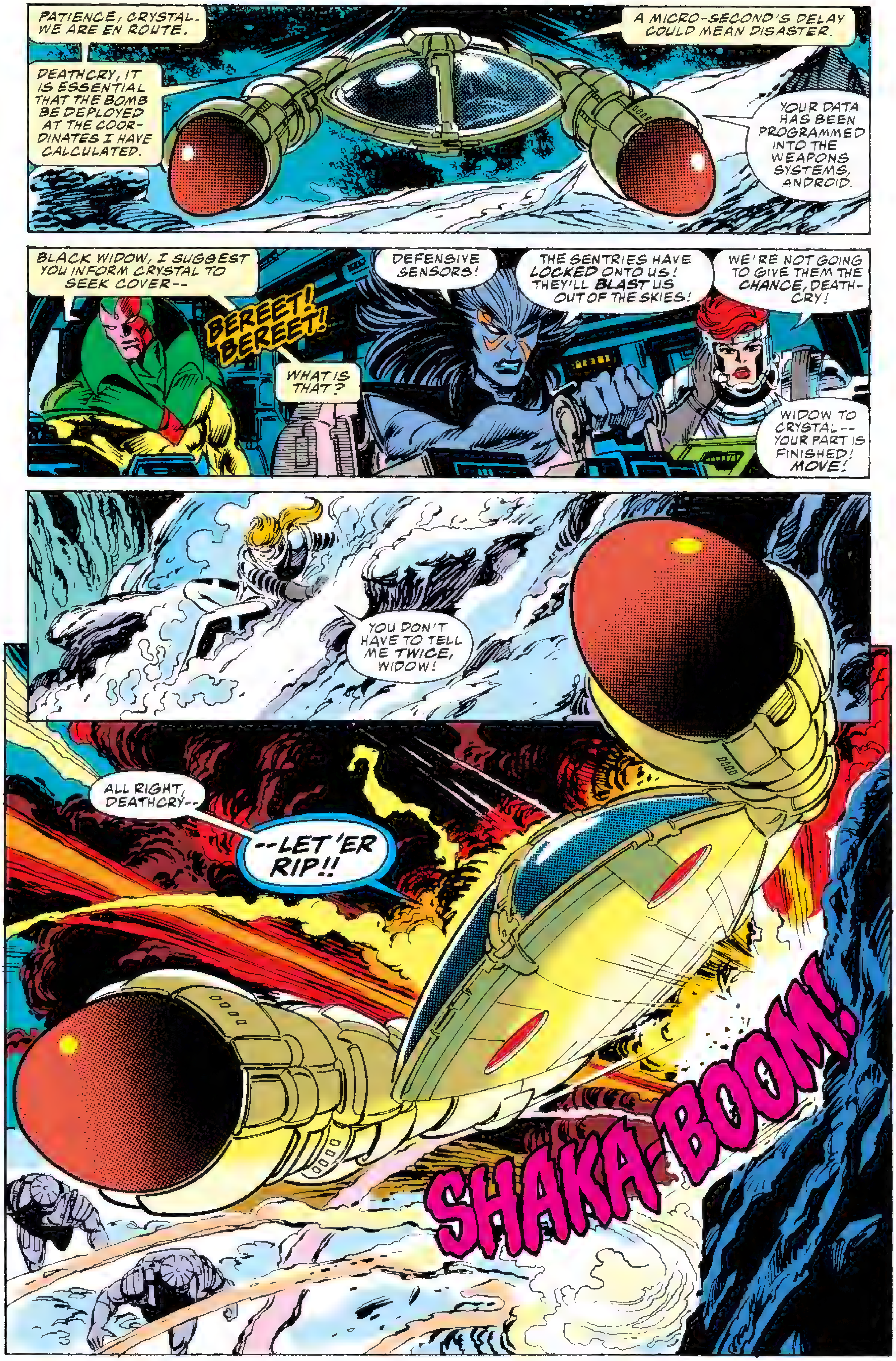

THE ANDES.
FASCINATING.
CAPTAIN... MY ANALYTICAL ABILITIES HAVE NEVER INTERFERED WITH MY MORE PHYSICAL SKILLS.
THEREFORE, YOUR REBUKE IS WITHOUT WARRANT.
HERCULES, AS I SURMISED, MY INTANGIBILITY HAS NEUTRALIZED THE SENTRY'S GUIDANCE SYSTEMS.
AND LEFT THIS MECHANICAL CONSTRUCT OPEN FOR ME!
MY THANKS, VISION!
SHA-POW!
STAND BACK, MAGDALENE!
I'VE BEEN HONING MY SEISMIC POWER LATELY...
...A HEAVILY CONCENTRATED BEAM SHOULD TAKE CARE OF SENTRY #2...
...QUITE NICELY, THANK YOU!
FWOOMMP!
THE PRESENCE OF HOSTILE KREE TECHNOLOGY ON EARTH COUPLED WITH THE ARRIVAL OF OUR SHI'AR WARNING...
...INDICATES THE POLITICAL UNION BETWEEN THOSE TWO POWERS IS NOT PROCEEDING SMOOTHLY.
VISION-- WE COULD USE A LITTLE LESS ANALYSIS...
...AND A LITTLE MORE ACTION! IN OTHER WORDS, MOVE IT, AVENGER!
DO NOT BECOME OVER-CONFIDENT, AVENGERS!
WE MUST RETREAT--THERE WILL BE MORE OF THOSE ABOMINATIONS!
VZZT
RETREAT?
DEATHCRY, IF YOU'VE BEEN SENT TO HELP US, THERE'S ONE THING YOU OUGHTA KNOW ABOUT THE AVENGERS--
--WE DON'T KNOW THE MEANING OF THE WORD!
THAT'S GOOD, DANE...
...BECAUSE THESE SENTRIES DON'T APPEAR TO UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT OF SURRENDERING!

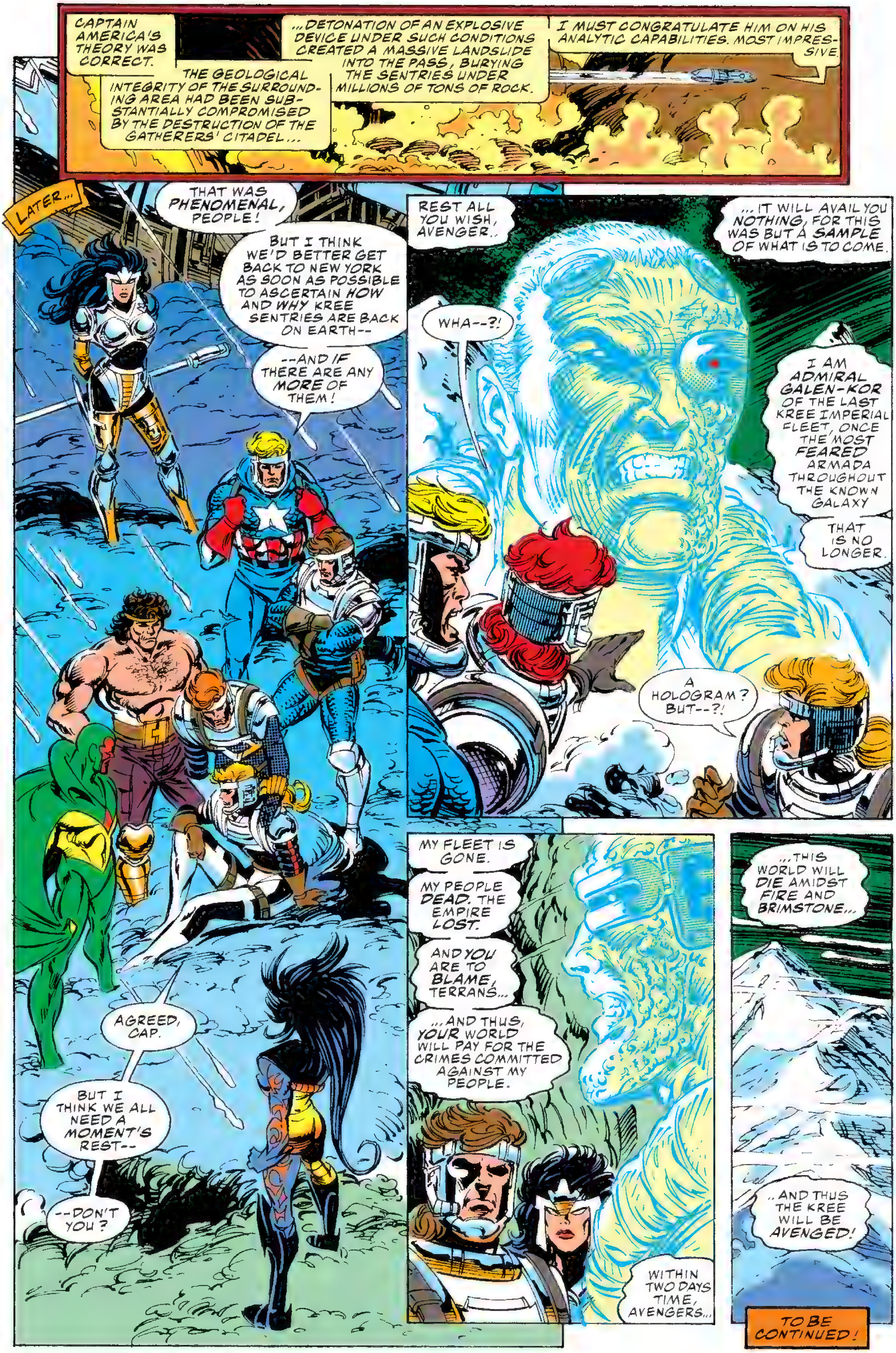

UHNN!
FZZAK!
SURRENDER IS NOT THE WAY OF THE KREE.
DANE --NO!
THE MALE IS SUBDUED. BIOLOGICAL SCANS CONFIRM YOUR RACIAL ORIGIN WITH THE KREE GENETIC PROGRAM, FEMALE...
...YOU, MORE THAN THE OTHERS, SHALL PAY FOR YOUR CRIMES AGAINST THE KREE STATE.
BY THE RINGS!
FASHAAM!
AN UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE.
I DO NOT FIND YOU IN THE AVENGERS DATA, TERRAN.
ME? AN AVENGER?
HARDLY, SENTRY.
BUT I TRULY DOUBT YOU'D BELIEVE THAT--
...SO IN THE INTEREST OF MY CONTINUED SURVIVAL-- LET CRYSTAL GO!
MAGDALENE!
GET THEE AWAY FROM THEM, GATHERER, OR I SWEAR BY FATHER ZEUS, I --
HERK, BUDDY, CALM DOWN!
YOU'VE GOT IT WRONG...!
MAGDALENE JUST SAVED OUR LIVES!


THREATEN ME AGAIN, OLYMPIAN...
...AND, I SWEAR, YOU'LL FIND YOURSELF AT THE RECEIVING END OF MY POWER LANCE!
THOU ART IN NO POSITION TO--
BY THE M'KRANN, ARE YOU ALL MAD?!
YOU FIGHT AMONGST YOURSELVES IN THE MIDST OF BATTLE--?!
THE DANGER IS FAR FROM OVER!
BEHOLD--
--AT THE MOUTH OF THE PASS! AN ENTIRE SQUADRON OF SENTRIES!
THERE ARE TOO MANY OF THEM--
--THEY CANNOT BE BEATEN!
CALM DOWN!
TELL ME QUICKLY--
--WHAT ARMAMENTS DO YOU HAVE ON BOARD?
VERY LITTLE. THE SHIP WAS STRIPPED DOWN FOR SPEED.
THERE IS A PLASMA BOMB, BUT ITS BLAST RADIUS IS LIMITED. IT IS NOT ENOUGH.
IT CANNOT TAKE AN ENTIRE SQUADRON OUT!
IT DOESN'T HAVE TO!
NATASHA, CRYSTAL-- I HAVE A PLAN!

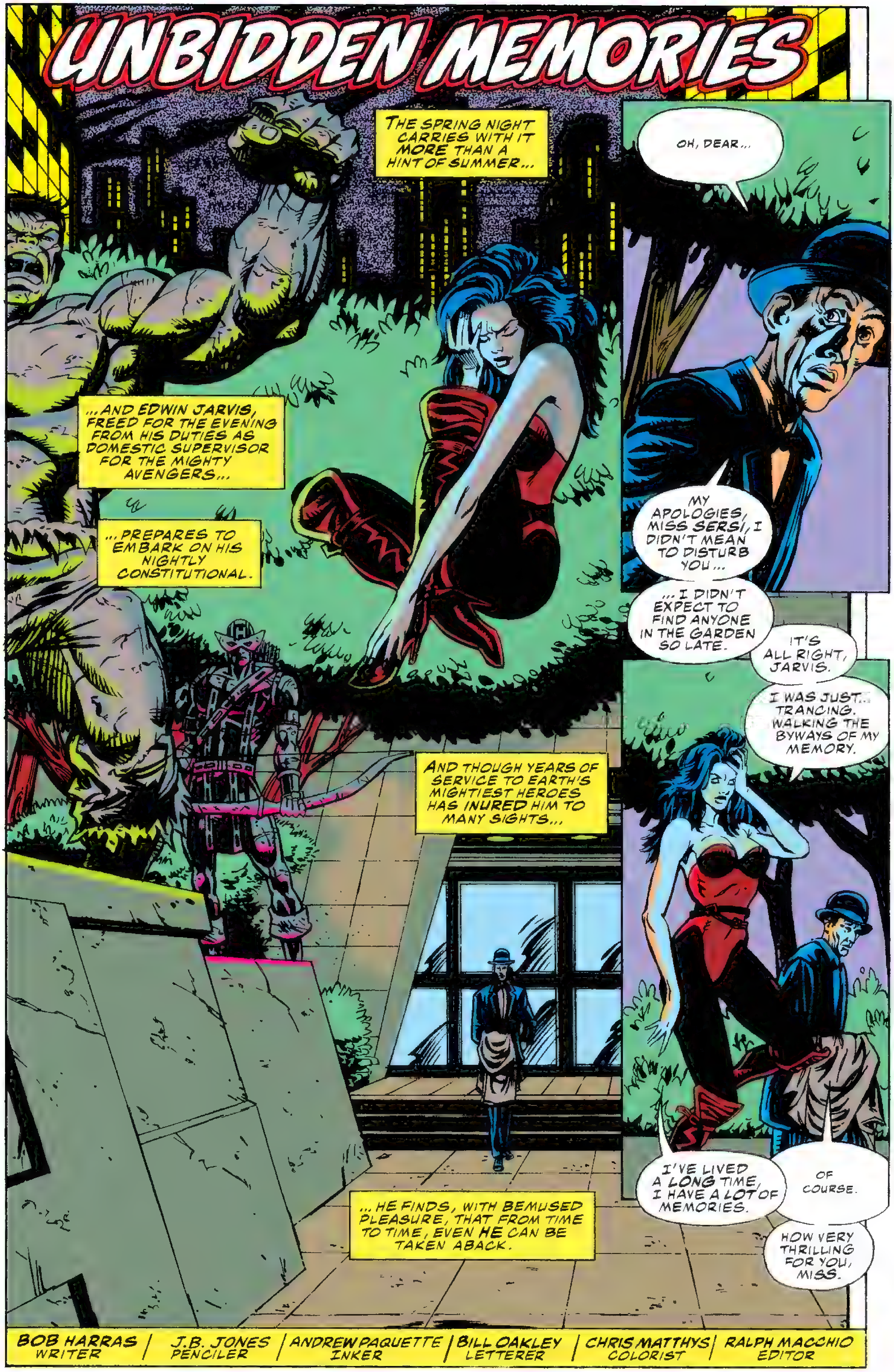
AND...
CAPTAIN, BY MY ESTIMATE...
...WE WILL BE WITHIN THE SENTRIES' WEAPONS RANGE WITHIN 82.3 SECONDS. WE ARE VASTLY OUTNUMBERED.
WE'RE NOT DEAD YET, AVENGER.
ALL RIGHT, WE ALL KNOW WHAT WE HAVE TO DO.
VISION, I'LL NEED YOU ON BOARD WITH 'TASHA AND DEATHCRY. I'M DEPENDING ON YOU TO PINPOINT THE SECOND WE NEED TO DEPLOY THE BOMB!
NO! THE MAJESTRIX MADE YOU MY RESPONSIBILITY!
I GO ALONE.
I DON'T THINK SO, LADY.
YOUR DEDICATION TO DUTY IS ADMIRABLE, BUT ALL OUR LIVES ARE AT STAKE HERE.
YOU DON'T KNOW US... AND WE CERTAINLY DON'T KNOW YOU...
...BUT FOR THE TIME BEING, LILANDRA NOTWITHSTANDING, WE WORK TOGETHER.
UNDERSTOOD.
LET US PROCEED.
SECONDS LATER...
YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO, CRYSTAL!
THEY'RE GETTING IN RANGE! GOOD LUCK, AVENGER!
ROARR!
FSHAK!
THANKS, CAP. I'LL NEED IT.


DEATHCRY'S SHIP IS GETTING INTO POSITION...
...AND THE SENTRIES ARE DIRECTLY BELOW ME IN THE VALLEY. IT'S NOW OR NEVER--
--I JUST PRAY THIS WORKS!
CRYSTAL MAXIMOFF IS AN ELEMENTAL...
...BORN WITH LIMITED CONTROL OF THE FOUR TRADITIONAL ELEMENTS: EARTH, WATER, FIRE AND AIR.
IT IS THIS LAST ELEMENT SHE USES AGAINST THE KREE ATTACKERS...
...HITTING THE SENTRIES HARD AND FAST WITH A CONCENTRATED WIND-FORCE SEVERAL TIMES HURRICANE STRENGTH.
IT IS BARELY ENOUGH.
CAP, CRYS CAN'T MAINTAIN THAT INTENSITY FOR LONG!
I KNOW, DANE.
BUT SHE'S HOLDING THEM BACK! SHE'S ONLY GOT TO HANG ON FOR A FEW MORE SECONDS--!
OUR TIME MAY HAVE RUN OUT, CAPTAIN! LOOK!
RANDAK'S BONES--NO!
THEY'RE STARTING TO BREAK THROUGH--THEY'RE COMING OUT OF THE PASS!
CRYSTAL TO NATASHA--DO YOU READ?!
WHERE IN SWEET AGON'S NAME ARE YOU?!

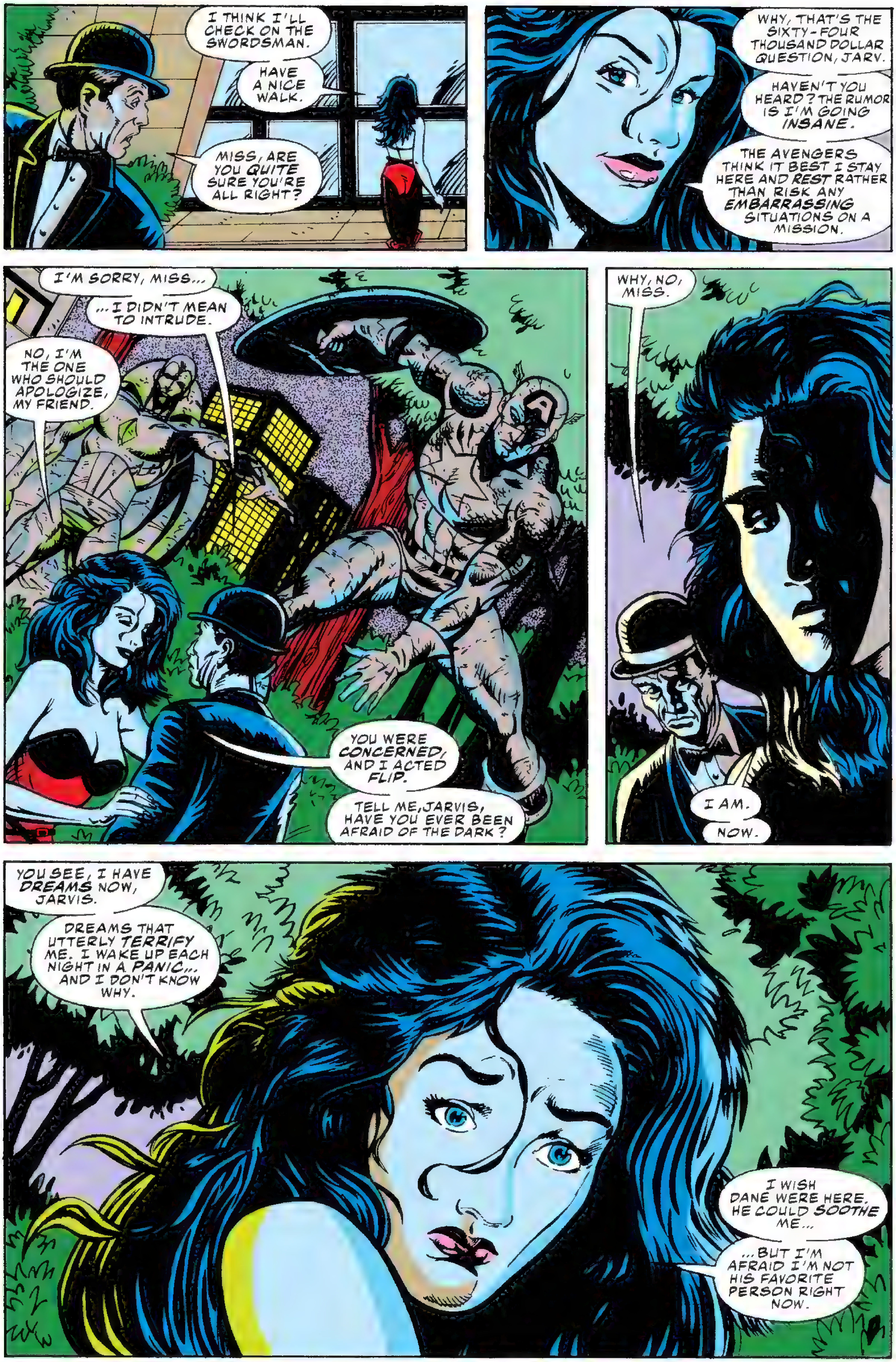

PATIENCE, CRYSTAL. WE ARE EN ROUTE.
DEATHCRY, IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT THE BOMB BE DEPLOYED AT THE COORDINATES I HAVE CALCULATED.
A MICRO-SECOND'S DELAY COULD MEAN DISASTER.
YOUR DATA HAS BEEN PROGRAMMED INTO THE WEAPONS SYSTEMS, ANDROID.
BLACK WIDOW, I SUGGEST YOU INFORM CRYSTAL TO SEEK COVER--
BEREET! BEREET!
WHAT IS THAT?
DEFENSIVE SENSORS!
THE SENTRIES HAVE LOCKED ONTO US! THEY'LL BLAST US OUT OF THE SKIES!
WE'RE NOT GOING TO GIVE THEM THE CHANCE, DEATHCRY!
WIDOW TO CRYSTAL-- YOUR PART IS FINISHED! MOVE!
YOU DON'T HAVE TO TELL ME TWICE, WIDOW!
ALL RIGHT, DEATHCRY--
--LET 'ER RIP!!
SHAKA-BOOM!

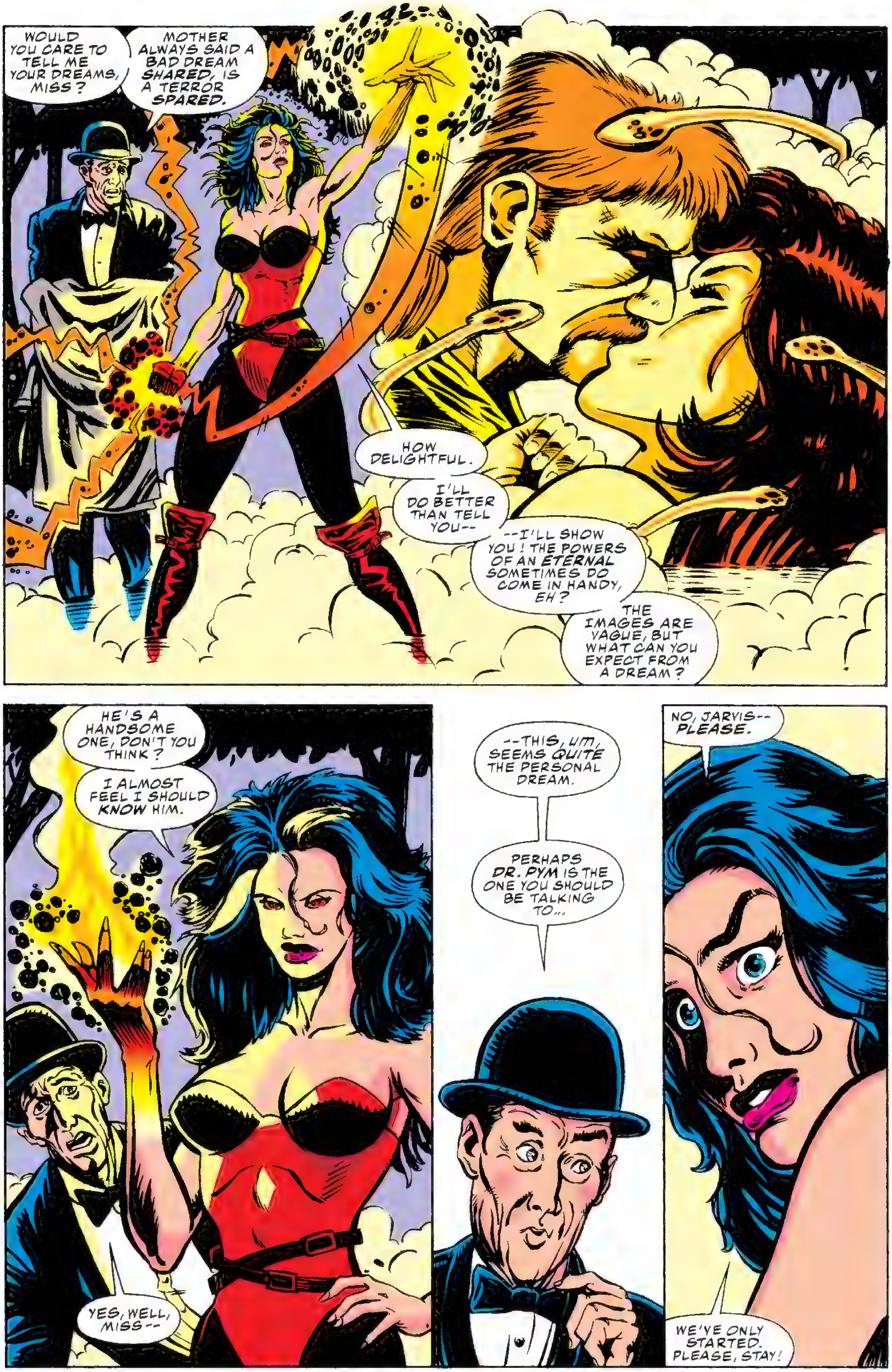

CAPTAIN AMERICA'S THEORY WAS CORRECT.
THE GEOLOGICAL INTEGRITY OF THE SURROUNDING AREA HAD BEEN SUBSTANTIALLY COMPROMISED BY THE DESTRUCTION OF THE GATHERERS' CITADEL...
...DETONATION OF AN EXPLOSIVE DEVICE UNDER SUCH CONDITIONS CREATED A MASSIVE LANDSLIDE INTO THE PASS, BURYING THE SENTRIES UNDER MILLIONS OF TONS OF ROCK.
I MUST CONGRATULATE HIM ON HIS ANALYTIC CAPABILITIES. MOST IMPRESSIVE.
LATER...
THAT WAS PHENOMENAL, PEOPLE!
BUT I THINK WE'D BETTER GET BACK TO NEW YORK AS SOON AS POSSIBLE TO ASCERTAIN HOW AND WHY KREE SENTRIES ARE BACK ON EARTH--
--AND IF THERE ARE ANY MORE OF THEM!
AGREED, CAP.
BUT I THINK WE ALL NEED A MOMENT'S REST--
--DON'T YOU?
REST ALL YOU WISH, AVENGER...
...IT WILL AVAIL YOU NOTHING, FOR THIS WAS BUT A SAMPLE OF WHAT IS TO COME.
WHA--?!
I AM ADMIRAL GALEN-KOR OF THE LAST KREE IMPERIAL FLEET, ONCE THE MOST FEARED ARMADA THROUGHOUT THE KNOWN GALAXY.
THAT IS NO LONGER.
A HOLOGRAM? BUT--?!
MY FLEET IS GONE.
MY PEOPLE DEAD. THE EMPIRE LOST.
AND YOU ARE TO BLAME, TERRANS...
...AND THUS, YOUR WORLD WILL PAY FOR THE CRIMES COMMITTED AGAINST MY PEOPLE.
WITHIN TWO DAYS TIME, AVENGERS...
...THIS WORLD WILL DIE AMIDST FIRE AND BRIMSTONE...
..AND THUS THE KREE WILL BE AVENGED!
TO BE CONTINUED!

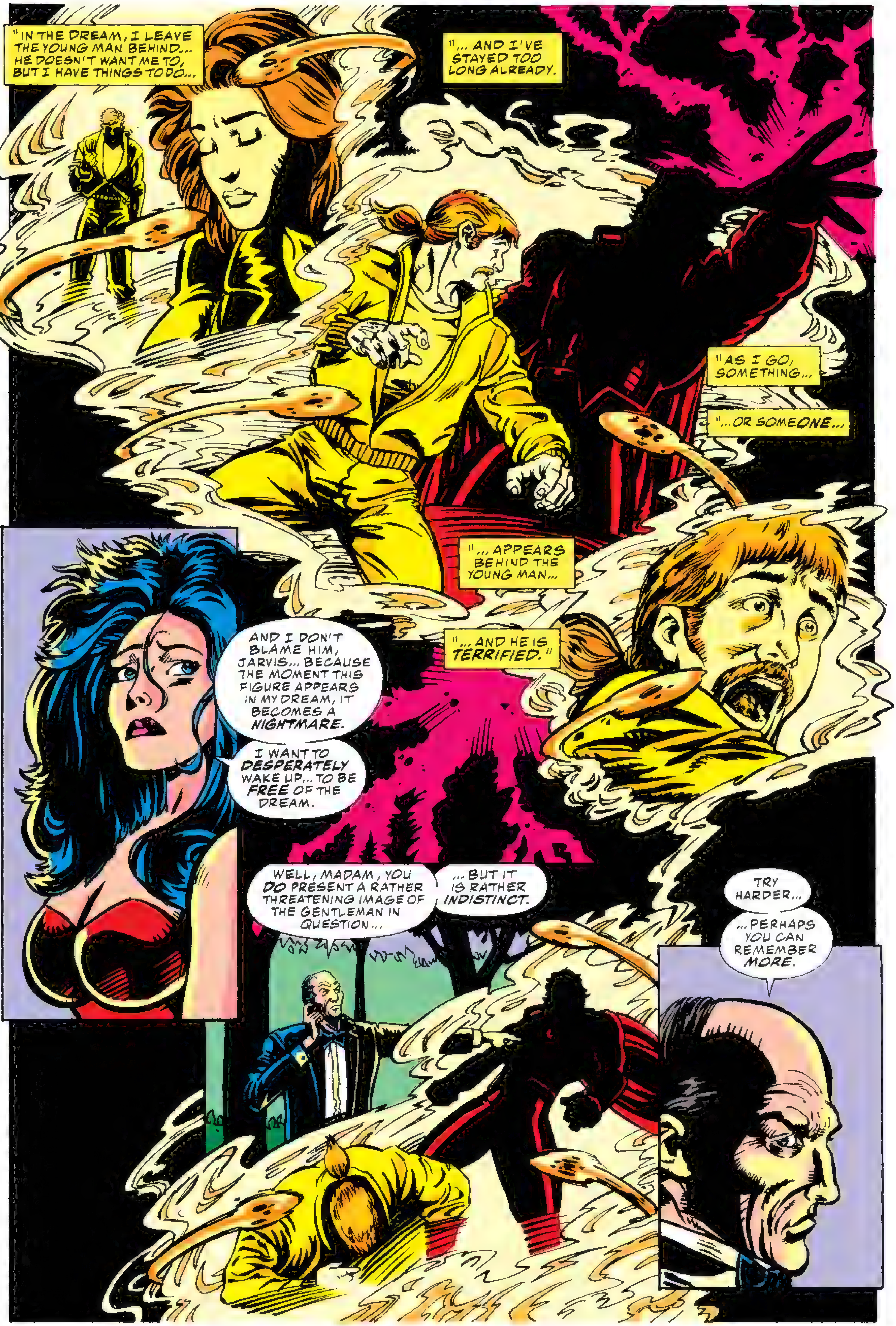
UNBIDDEN MEMORIES

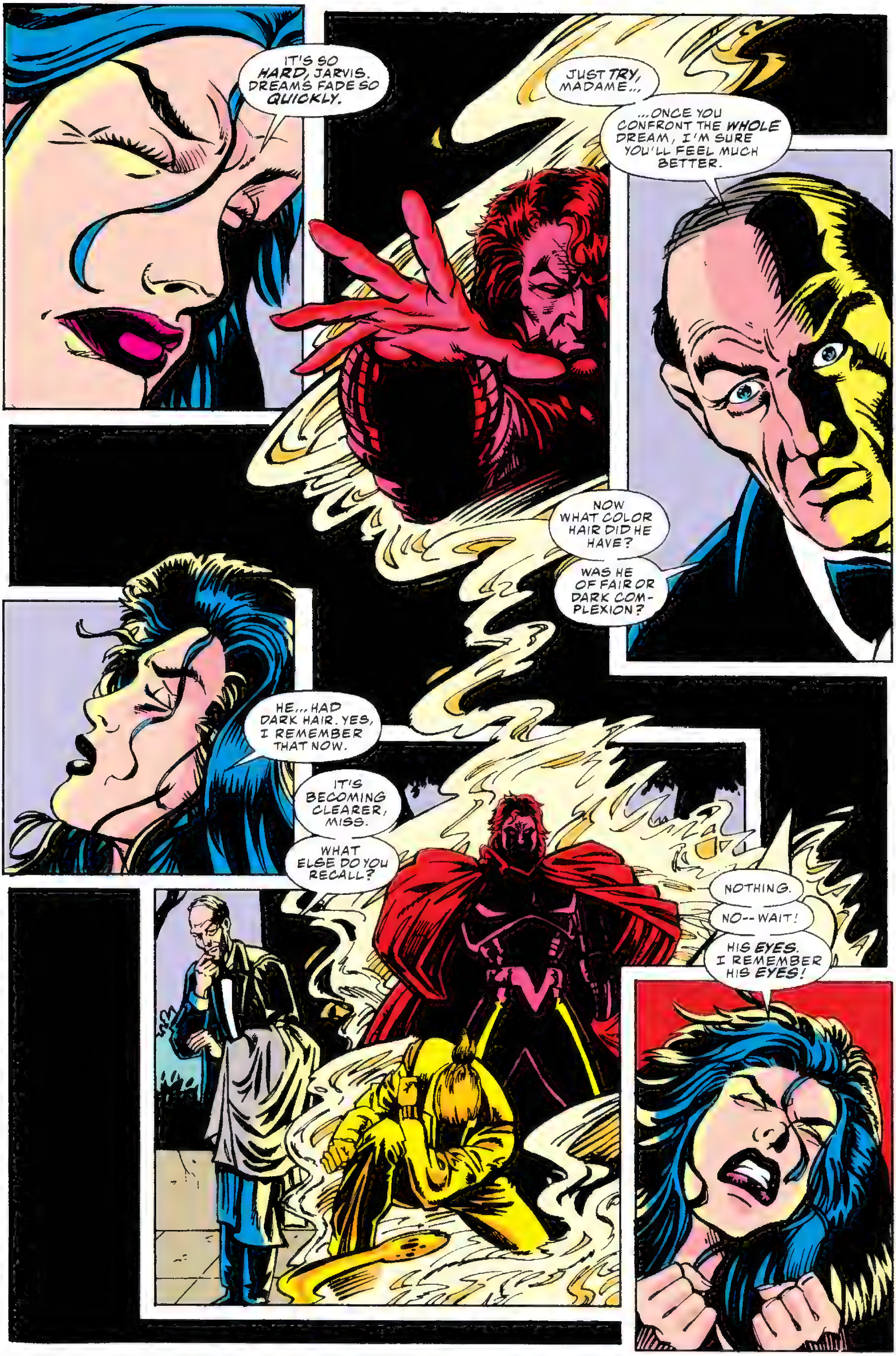

THE SPRING NIGHT CARRIES WITH IT MORE THAN A HINT OF SUMMER...
...AND EDWIN JARVIS, FREED FOR THE EVENING FROM HIS DUTIES AS DOMESTIC SUPERVISOR FOR THE MIGHTY AVENGERS...
...PREPARES TO EMBARK ON HIS NIGHTLY CONSTITUTIONAL.
AND THOUGH YEARS OF SERVICE TO EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES HAS INURED HIM TO MANY SIGHTS...
...HE FINDS, WITH BEMUSED PLEASURE, THAT FROM TIME TO TIME, EVEN HE CAN BE TAKEN ABACK.
OH, DEAR...
MY APOLOGIES, MISS SERSI, I DIDN'T MEAN TO DISTURB YOU...
...I DIDN'T EXPECT TO FIND ANYONE IN THE GARDEN SO LATE.
IT'S ALL RIGHT, JARVIS.
I WAS JUST... TRANCING. WALKING THE BYWAYS OF MY MEMORY.
I'VE LIVED A LONG TIME, I HAVE A LOT OF MEMORIES.
OF COURSE.
HOW VERY THRILLING FOR YOU, MISS.

BOB HARRAS WRITER | J.B. JONES PENCILER | ANDREW PAQUETTE INKER | BILL OAKLEY LETTERER | CHRIS MATTHYS COLORIST | RALPH MACCHIO EDITOR

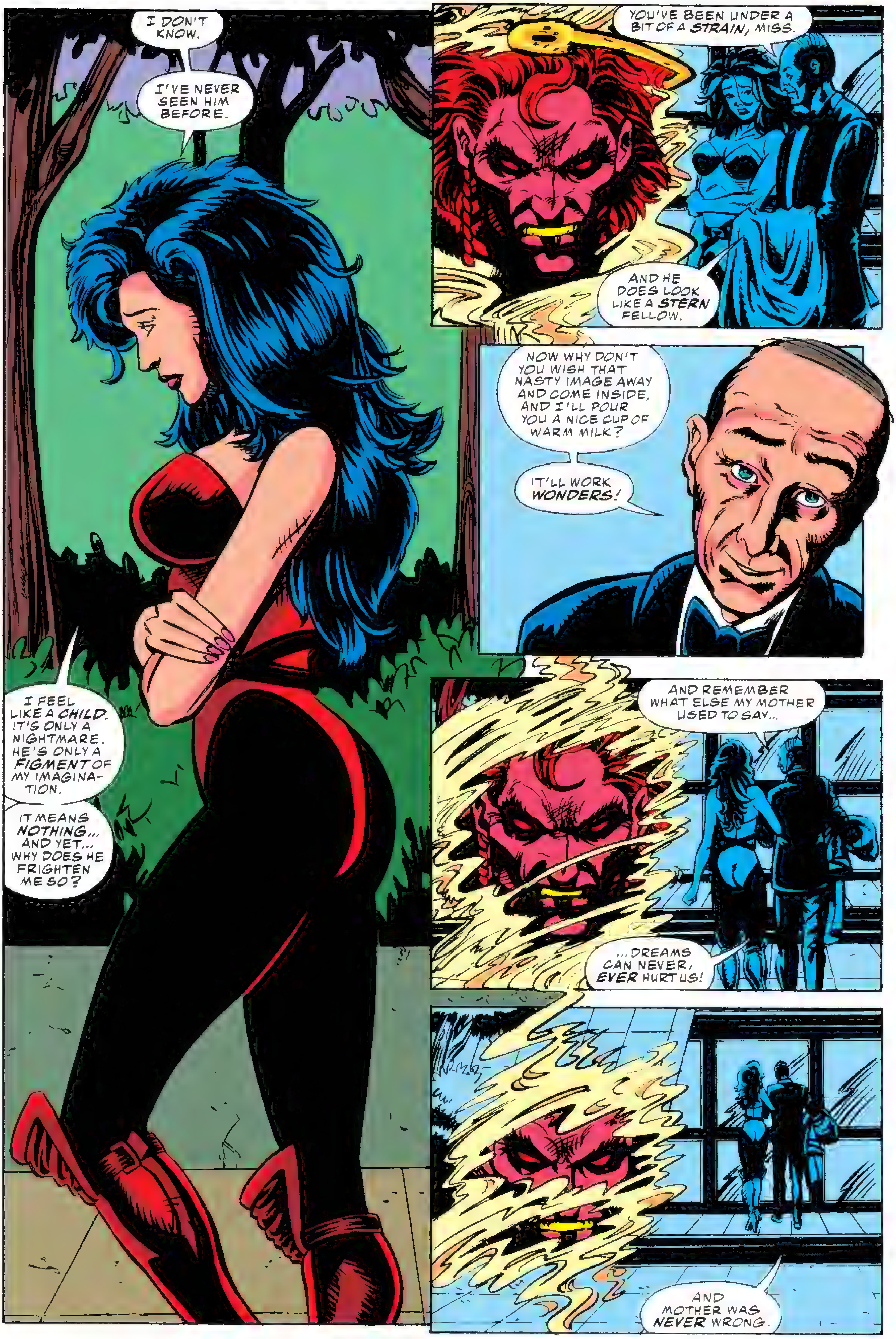

I THINK I'LL CHECK ON THE SWORDSMAN.
HAVE A NICE WALK.
MISS, ARE YOU *QUITE* SURE YOU'RE ALL RIGHT?
WHY, THAT'S THE SIXTY-FOUR THOUSAND DOLLAR QUESTION, JARV.
HAVEN'T YOU HEARD? THE RUMOR IS I'M GOING *INSANE*.
THE AVENGERS THINK IT BEST I STAY HERE AND *REST* RATHER THAN RISK ANY *EMBARRASSING* SITUATIONS ON A MISSION.
I'M SORRY, MISS...
...I DIDN'T MEAN TO INTRUDE.
NO, I'M THE ONE WHO SHOULD APOLOGIZE, MY FRIEND.
YOU WERE *CONCERNED*, AND I ACTED *FLIP*.
TELL ME, JARVIS, HAVE YOU EVER BEEN AFRAID OF THE DARK?
WHY, NO, MISS.
I AM.
NOW.
YOU SEE, I HAVE *DREAMS* NOW, JARVIS.
DREAMS THAT UTTERLY *TERRIFY* ME. I WAKE UP EACH NIGHT IN A *PANIC*... AND I DON'T KNOW WHY.
I WISH DANE WERE HERE. HE COULD *SOOTHE* ME...
...BUT I'M AFRAID I'M NOT HIS FAVORITE PERSON RIGHT NOW.


WOULD YOU CARE TO TELL ME YOUR DREAMS, MISS?
MOTHER ALWAYS SAID A BAD DREAM SHARED, IS A TERROR SPARED.
HOW DELIGHTFUL.
I'LL DO BETTER THAN TELL YOU--
--I'LL SHOW YOU! THE POWERS OF AN ETERNAL SOMETIMES DO COME IN HANDY, EH?
THE IMAGES ARE VAGUE, BUT WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT FROM A DREAM?
HE'S A HANDSOME ONE, DON'T YOU THINK?
I ALMOST FEEL I SHOULD KNOW HIM.
YES, WELL, MISS--
--THIS, UM, SEEMS QUITE THE PERSONAL DREAM.
PERHAPS DR. PYM IS THE ONE YOU SHOULD BE TALKING TO...
NO, JARVIS-- PLEASE.
WE'VE ONLY STARTED. PLEASE, STAY!


"IN THE DREAM, I LEAVE THE YOUNG MAN BEHIND... HE DOESN'T WANT ME TO, BUT I HAVE THINGS TO DO...
"... AND I'VE STAYED TOO LONG ALREADY.
"AS I GO, SOMETHING...
"...OR SOME*ONE*...
"... APPEARS BEHIND THE YOUNG MAN...
"... AND HE IS *TERRIFIED*."
AND I DON'T BLAME HIM, JARVIS... BECAUSE THE MOMENT THIS FIGURE APPEARS IN MY DREAM, IT BECOMES A *NIGHTMARE*.
I WANT TO *DESPERATELY* WAKE UP... TO BE *FREE* OF THE DREAM.
WELL, MADAM, YOU *DO* PRESENT A RATHER THREATENING IMAGE OF THE GENTLEMAN IN QUESTION...
... BUT IT IS RATHER *INDISTINCT*.
TRY HARDER...
... PERHAPS YOU CAN REMEMBER *MORE*.


IT'S SO **HARD**, JARVIS. DREAMS FADE SO **QUICKLY**.
JUST **TRY**, MADAME...
...ONCE YOU CONFRONT THE **WHOLE** DREAM, I'M SURE YOU'LL FEEL MUCH BETTER.
NOW WHAT COLOR HAIR DID HE HAVE?
WAS HE OF FAIR OR DARK COMPLEXION?
HE... HAD DARK HAIR. YES, I REMEMBER THAT NOW.
IT'S BECOMING CLEARER, MISS.
WHAT ELSE DO YOU RECALL?
NOTHING.
NO-- WAIT!
HIS **EYES**. I REMEMBER HIS **EYES**!

THEY WERE COLD, ANGRY EYES!
THERE, JARVIS! THERE HE IS!
A RATHER MENACING GENTLEMAN, INDEED, MISS.
BUT... WHO IS HE?


I DON'T KNOW.
I'VE NEVER SEEN HIM BEFORE.
I FEEL LIKE A **CHILD**. IT'S ONLY A NIGHTMARE. HE'S ONLY A **FIGMENT** OF MY IMAGINATION.
IT MEANS **NOTHING**... AND YET... WHY DOES HE FRIGHTEN ME SO?
YOU'VE BEEN UNDER A BIT OF A **STRAIN**, MISS.
AND HE DOES LOOK LIKE A **STERN** FELLOW.
NOW WHY DON'T YOU WISH THAT NASTY IMAGE AWAY AND COME INSIDE, AND I'LL POUR YOU A NICE CUP OF WARM MILK?
IT'LL WORK **WONDERS**!
AND REMEMBER WHAT ELSE MY MOTHER USED TO SAY...
...DREAMS CAN NEVER, **EVER** HURT US!
AND MOTHER WAS **NEVER** WRONG.

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AT LAST THE EBONY BLADE BELONGS TO THE BLOODWRAITH!
S. McDANIEL H. COLLAZO '93
PUT YOUR MONEY ON THE NEW GUY-- 'CAUSE THE BLACK KNIGHT™ DOESN'T STAND A CHANCE!

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CHRIS MATTHYS *Colorist*

"A GAMBLE WITH TIME" pg. 47
ROY THOMAS
& R.J.M. LOFFICIER *Writers*
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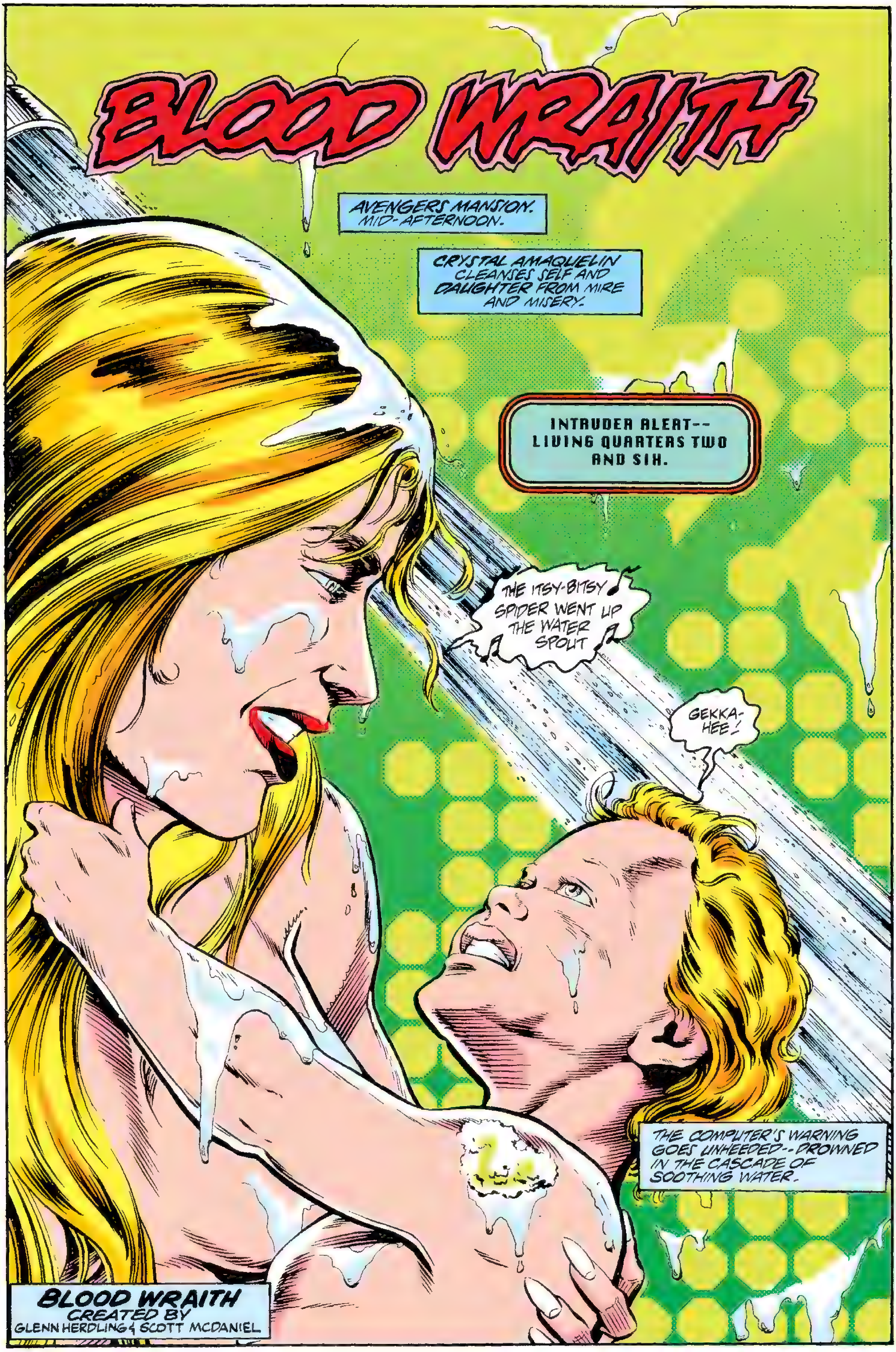
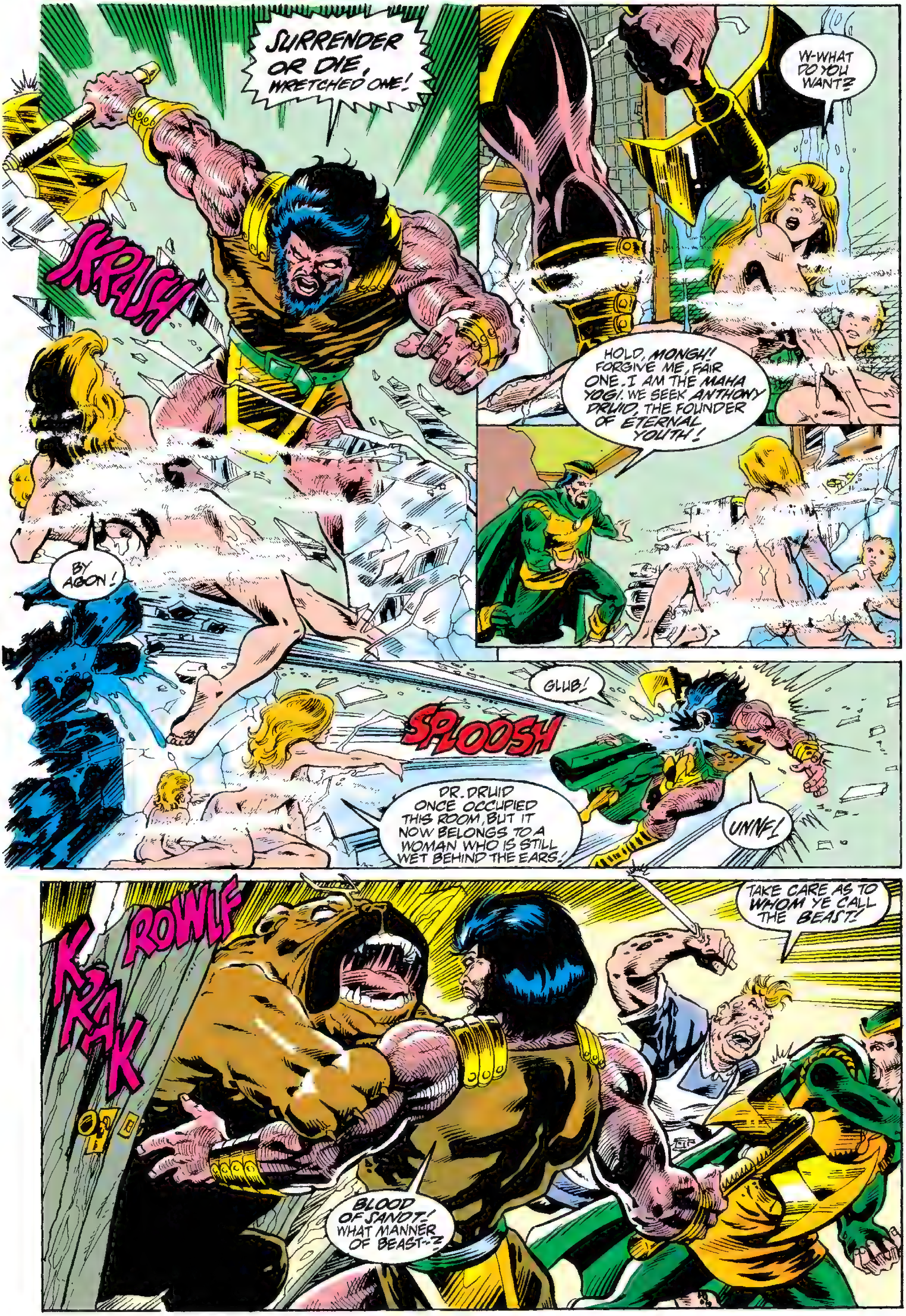
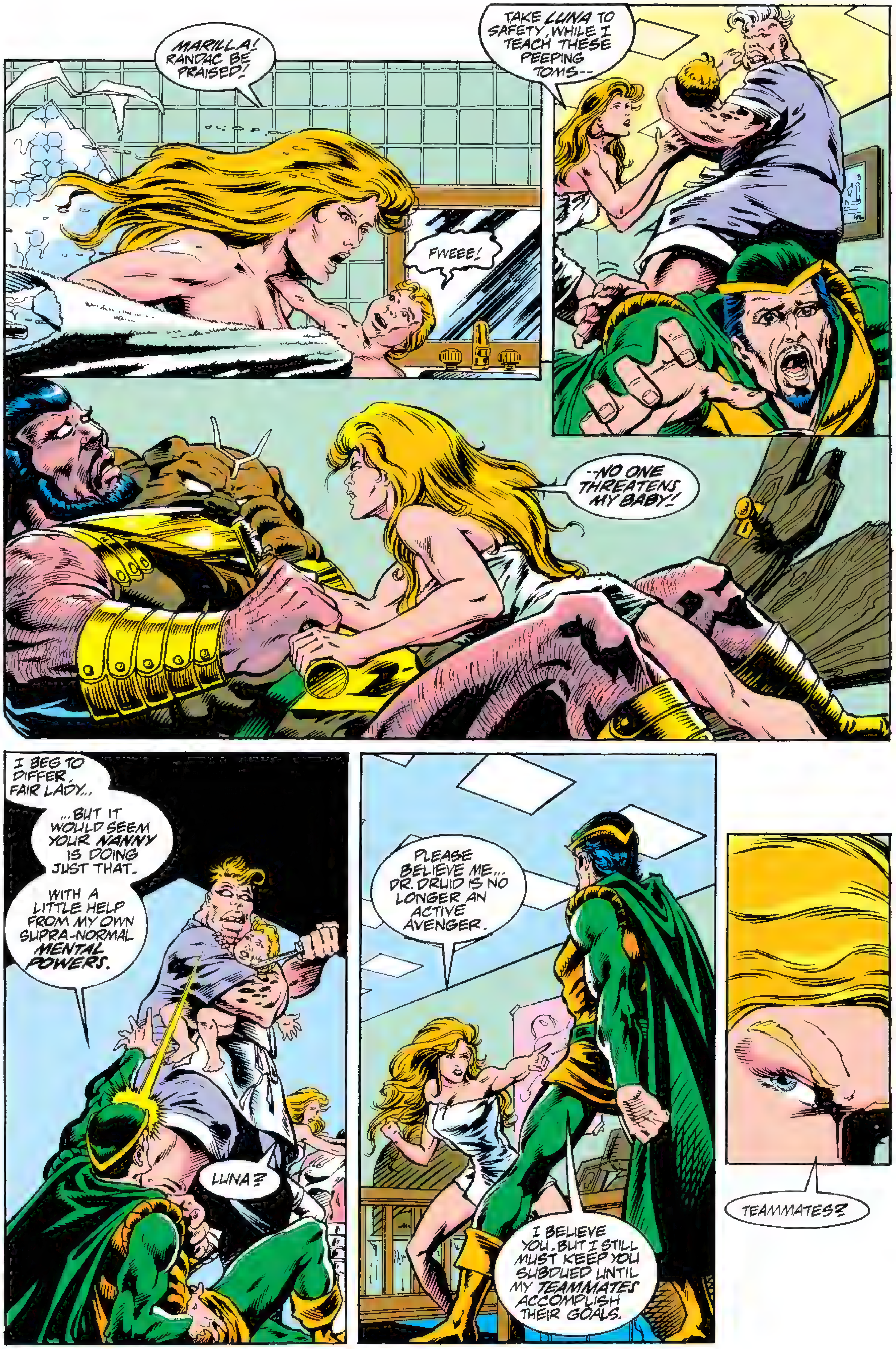
CHRIS MATTHYS *Colorist*

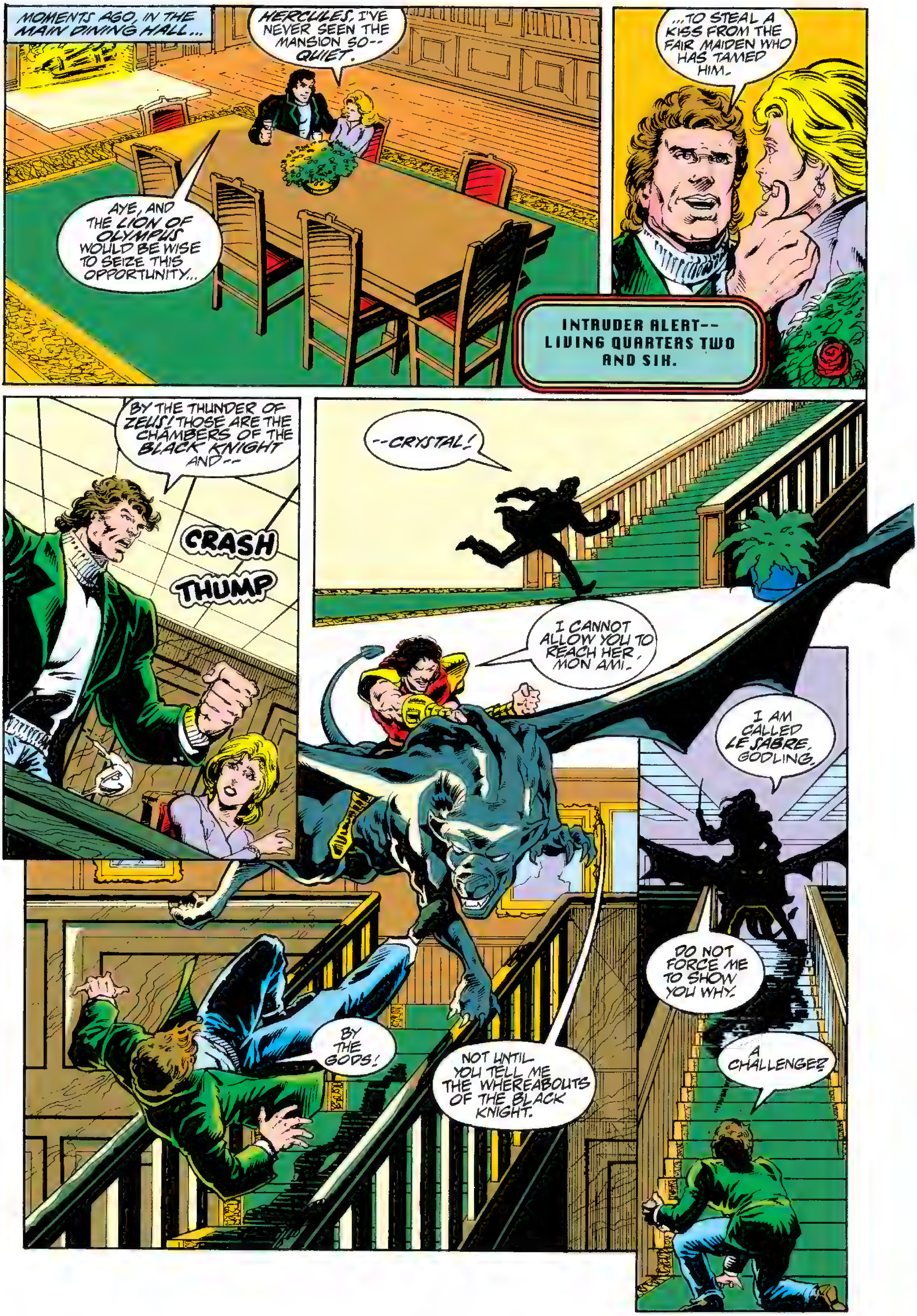
LETTERS PAGE pg. 62

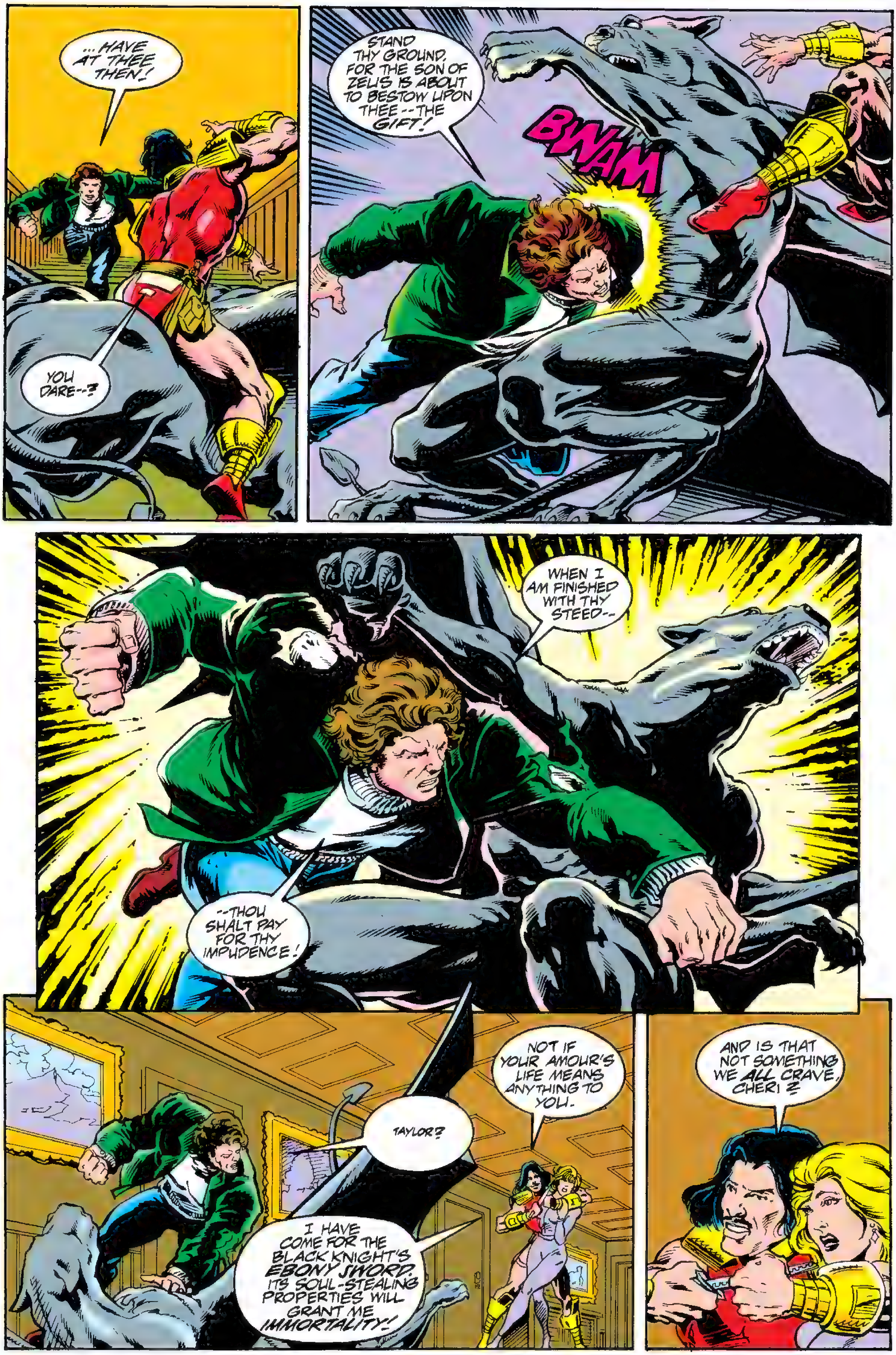
MARK PACELLA·93·DAN PANOSIAN

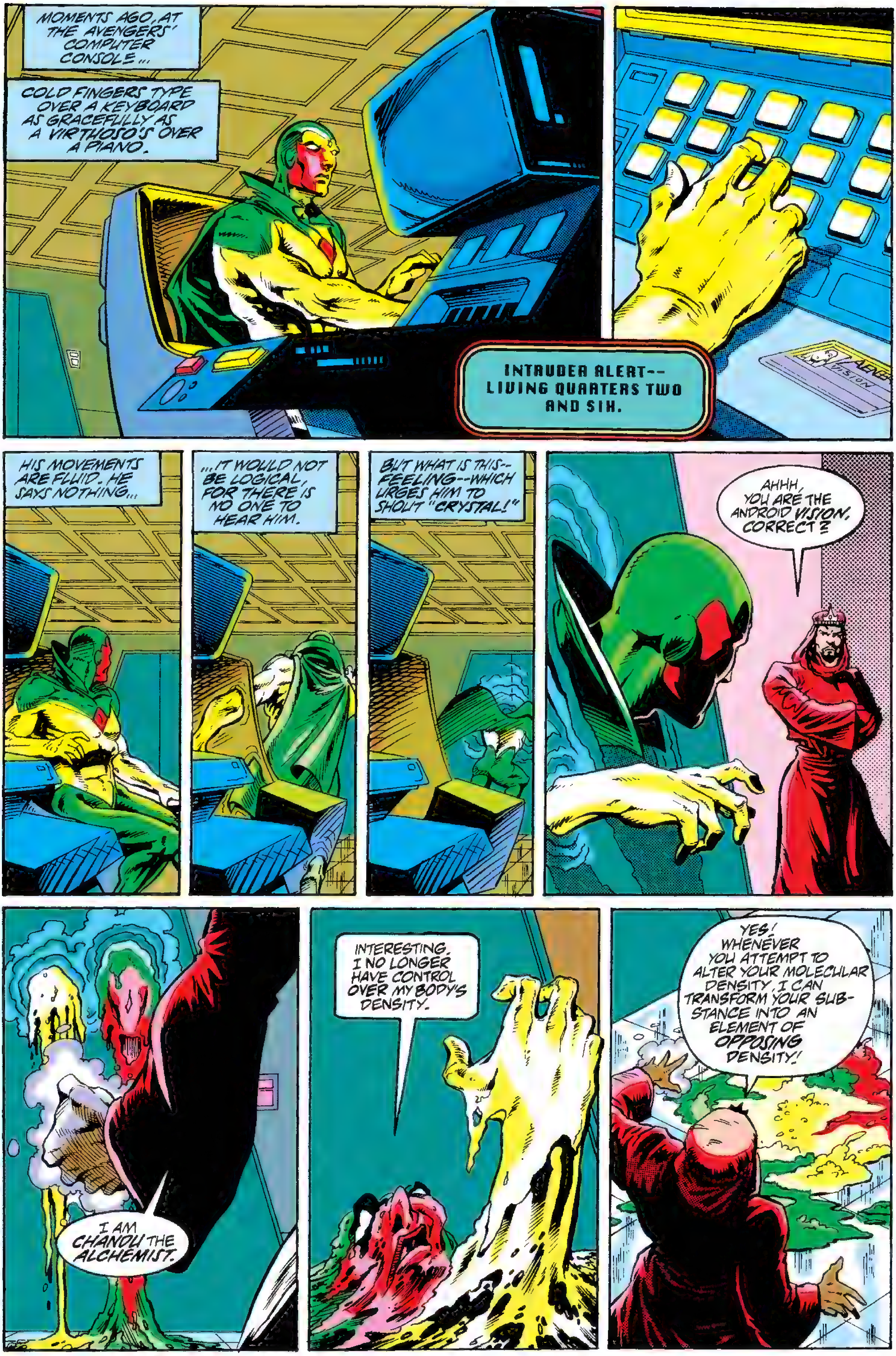

BLOOD WRAITH
AVENGERS MANSION. MID-AFTERNOON.
CRYSTAL AMAQUELIN CLEANSES SELF AND DAUGHTER FROM MIRE AND MISERY.
INTRUDER ALERT-- LIVING QUARTERS TWO AND SIX.
THE ITSY-BITSY SPIDER WENT UP THE WATER SPOUT
GEKKA-HEE!
THE COMPUTER'S WARNING GOES UNHEEDED--DROWNED IN THE CASCADE OF SOOTHING WATER.
BLOOD WRAITH CREATED BY GLENN HERDLING & SCOTT MCDANIEL

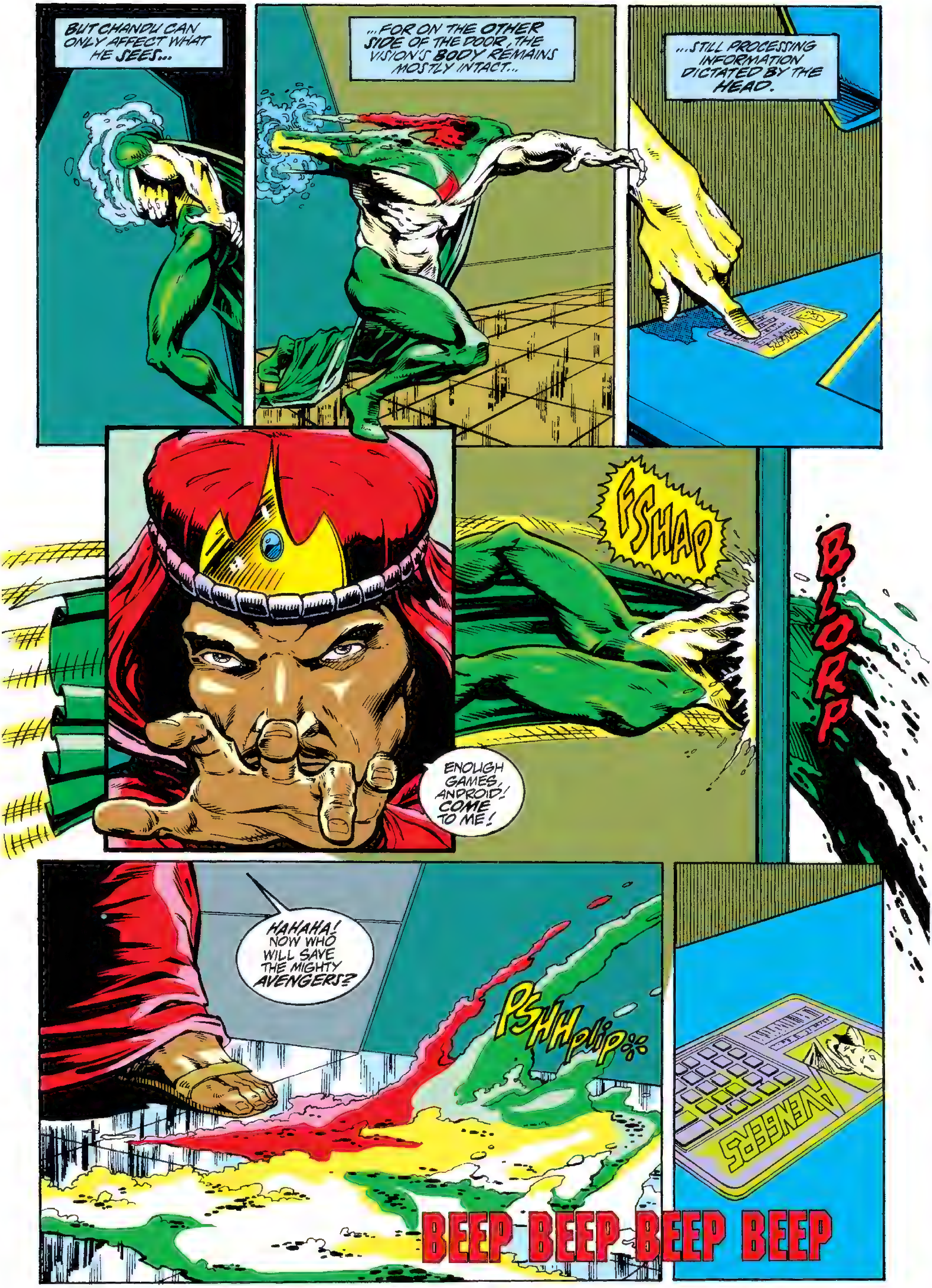

SURRENDER OR DIE, WRETCHED ONE!
SKRASH
BY AGON!
W-WHAT DO YOU WANT?
HOLD, MONGH! FORGIVE ME, FAIR ONE. I AM THE MAHA YOGI. WE SEEK ANTHONY DRUID, THE FOUNDER OF ETERNAL YOUTH!
GLUB!
SPLOOSH
DR. DRUID ONCE OCCUPIED THIS ROOM, BUT IT NOW BELONGS TO A WOMAN WHO IS STILL WET BEHIND THE EARS!
UNNF!
KRAK
ROWLF
TAKE CARE AS TO WHOM YE CALL THE BEAST!
BLOOD OF SANOT! WHAT MANNER OF BEAST--?

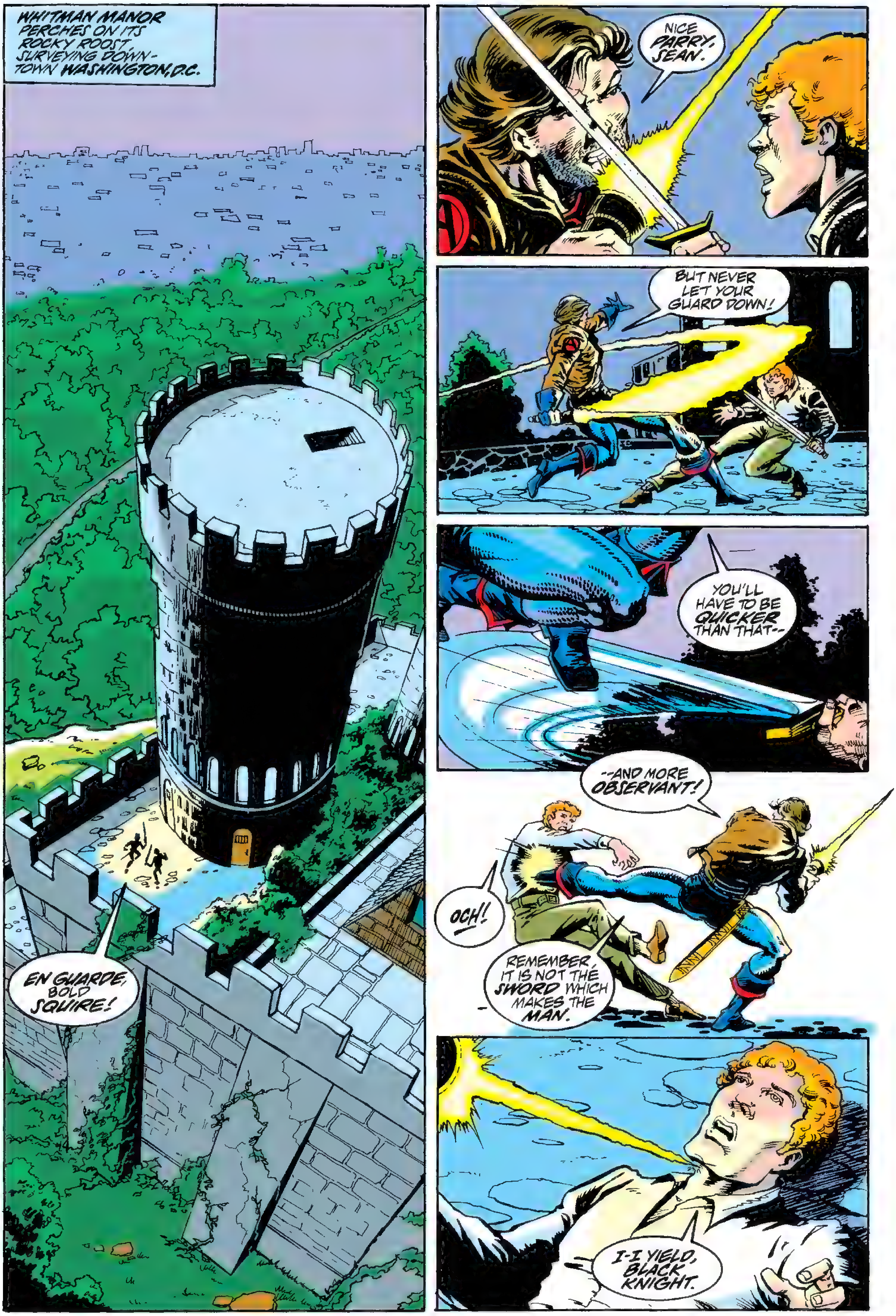

MARILLA! RANDAC BE PRAISED!
FWEEE!
TAKE *LUNA* TO SAFETY, WHILE I TEACH THESE PEEPING TOMS--
--NO ONE THREATENS MY BABY!
I BEG TO DIFFER, FAIR LADY...
...BUT IT WOULD SEEM YOUR *NANNY* IS DOING JUST THAT.
WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MY OWN SUPRA-NORMAL *MENTAL POWERS.*
LUNA?
PLEASE BELIEVE ME... DR. DRUID IS NO LONGER AN ACTIVE AVENGER.
I BELIEVE YOU...BUT I STILL MUST KEEP YOU SUBDUED UNTIL MY *TEAMMATES* ACCOMPLISH THEIR GOALS.
TEAMMATES?

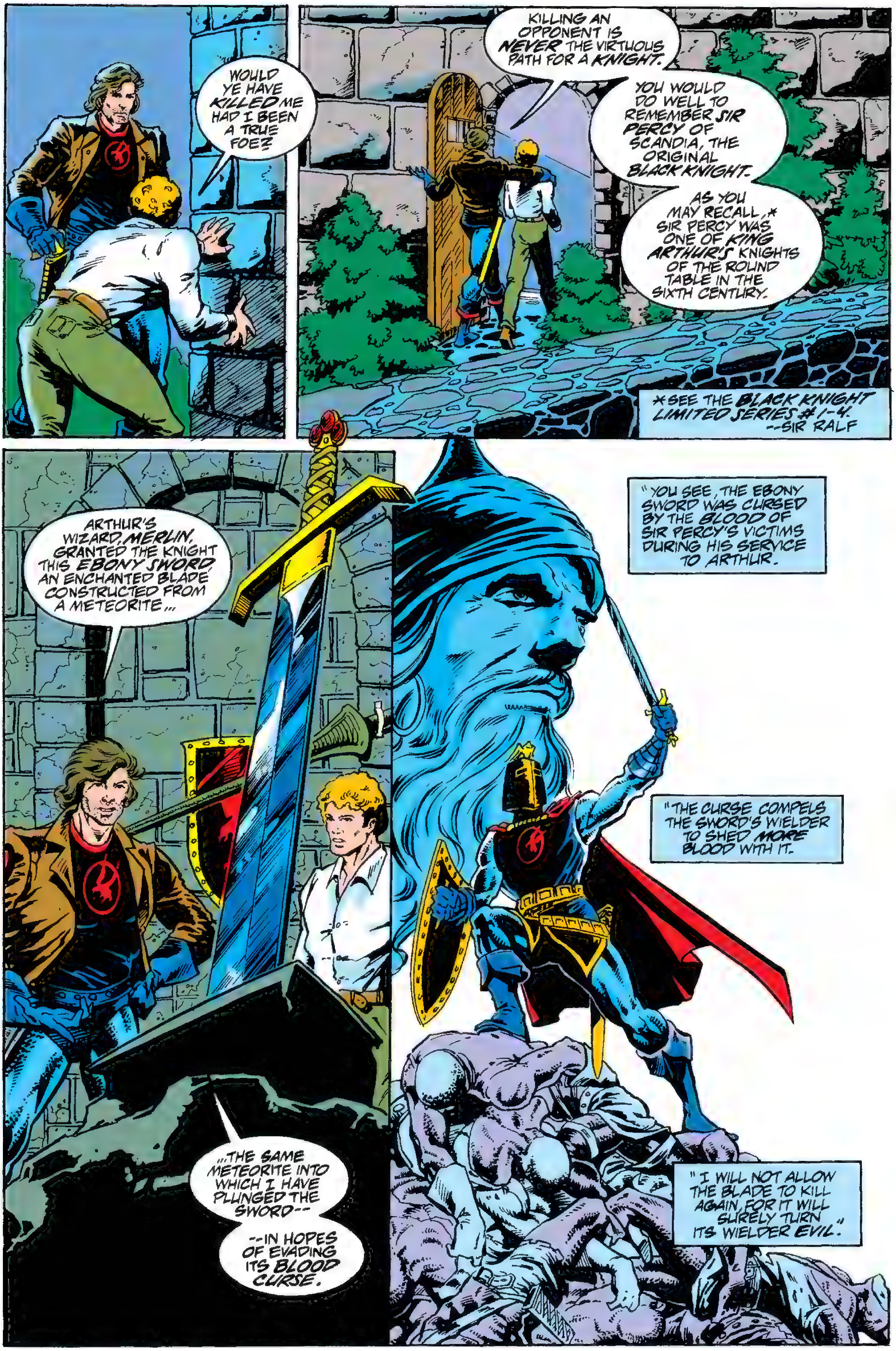

MOMENTS AGO, IN THE MAIN DINING HALL...
HERCULES, I'VE NEVER SEEN THE MANSION SO--QUIET.
AYE, AND THE LION OF OLYMPUS WOULD BE WISE TO SEIZE THIS OPPORTUNITY...
...TO STEAL A KISS FROM THE FAIR MAIDEN WHO HAS TAMED HIM.
INTRUDER ALERT--LIVING QUARTERS TWO AND SIX.
BY THE THUNDER OF ZEUS! THOSE ARE THE CHAMBERS OF THE BLACK KNIGHT AND--
CRASH
THUMP
--CRYSTAL!
I CANNOT ALLOW YOU TO REACH HER, MON AMI.
I AM CALLED LE SABRE, GODLING.
BY THE GODS!
NOT UNTIL YOU TELL ME THE WHEREABOUTS OF THE BLACK KNIGHT.
DO NOT FORCE ME TO SHOW YOU WHY.
A CHALLENGE?

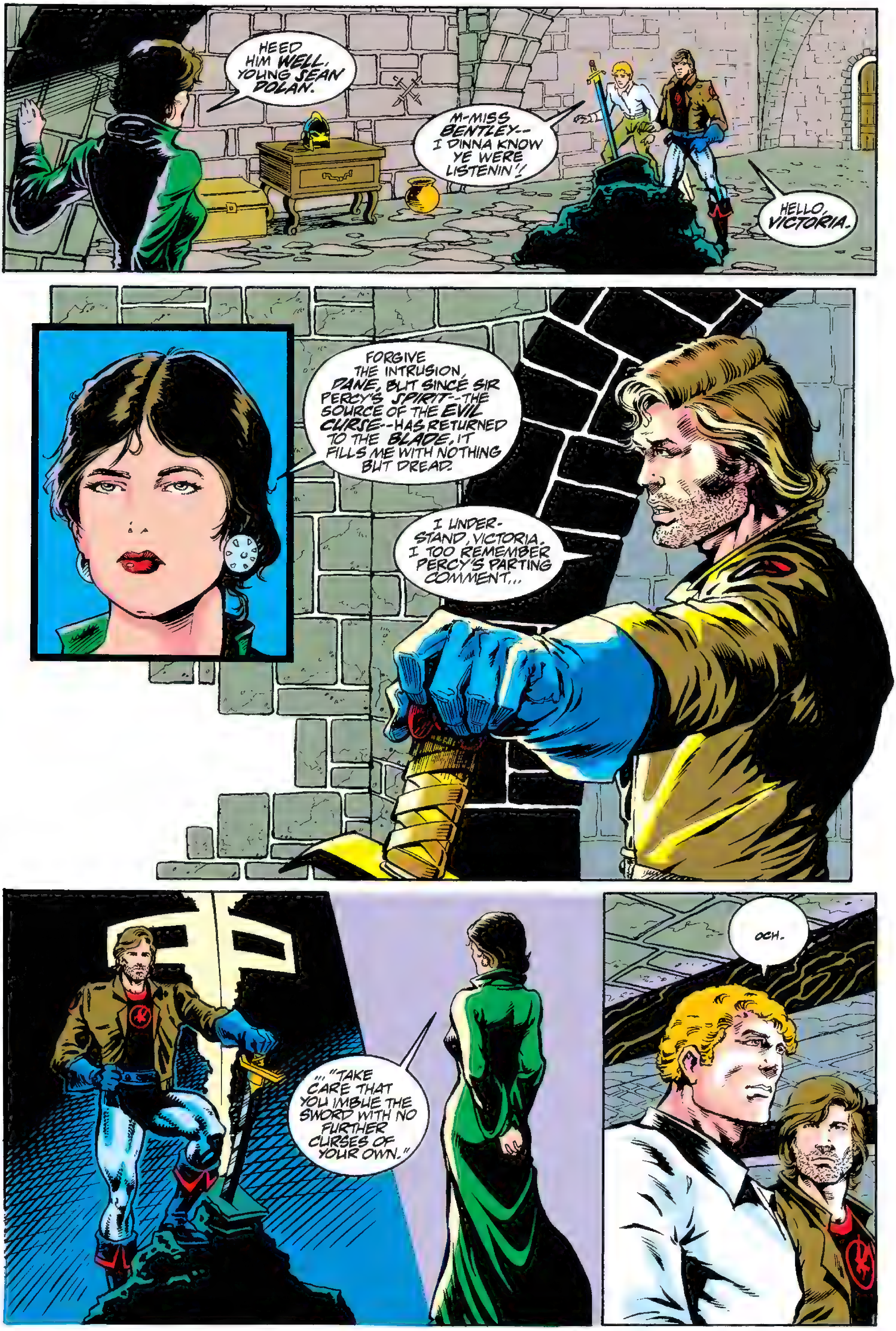

...HAVE AT THEE THEN!
YOU DARE--?
STAND THY GROUND, FOR THE SON OF ZEUS IS ABOUT TO BESTOW UPON THEE -- THE GIFT!
BWAM
WHEN I AM FINISHED WITH THY STEED--
--THOU SHALT PAY FOR THY IMPUDENCE!
TAYLOR?
NOT IF YOUR AMOUR'S LIFE MEANS ANYTHING TO YOU.
I HAVE COME FOR THE BLACK KNIGHT'S EBONY SWORD. ITS SOUL-STEALING PROPERTIES WILL GRANT ME IMMORTALITY!
AND IS THAT NOT SOMETHING WE ALL CRAVE, CHERI?

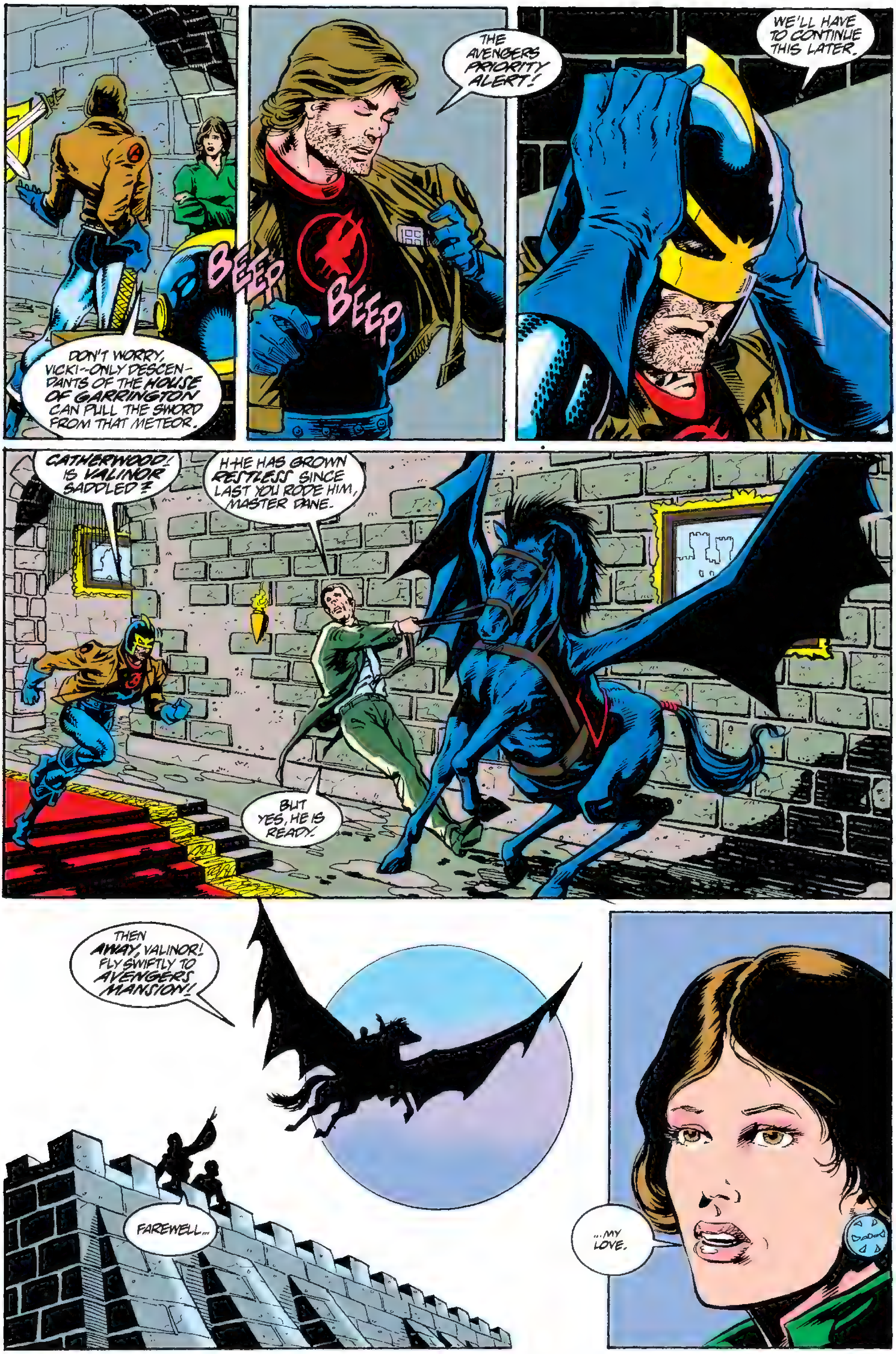

MOMENTS AGO, AT THE AVENGERS' COMPUTER CONSOLE...
COLD FINGERS TYPE OVER A KEYBOARD AS GRACEFULLY AS A VIRTUOSO'S OVER A PIANO.
INTRUDER ALERT-- LIVING QUARTERS TWO AND SIX.
VISION
HIS MOVEMENTS ARE FLUID. HE SAYS NOTHING...
...IT WOULD NOT BE LOGICAL, FOR THERE IS NO ONE TO HEAR HIM.
BUT WHAT IS THIS-- FEELING--WHICH URGES HIM TO SHOUT "CRYSTAL!"
AHHH, YOU ARE THE ANDROID VISION, CORRECT?
I AM CHANDU THE ALCHEMIST.
INTERESTING. I NO LONGER HAVE CONTROL OVER MY BODY'S DENSITY.
YES! WHENEVER YOU ATTEMPT TO ALTER YOUR MOLECULAR DENSITY, I CAN TRANSFORM YOUR SUBSTANCE INTO AN ELEMENT OF OPPOSING DENSITY!

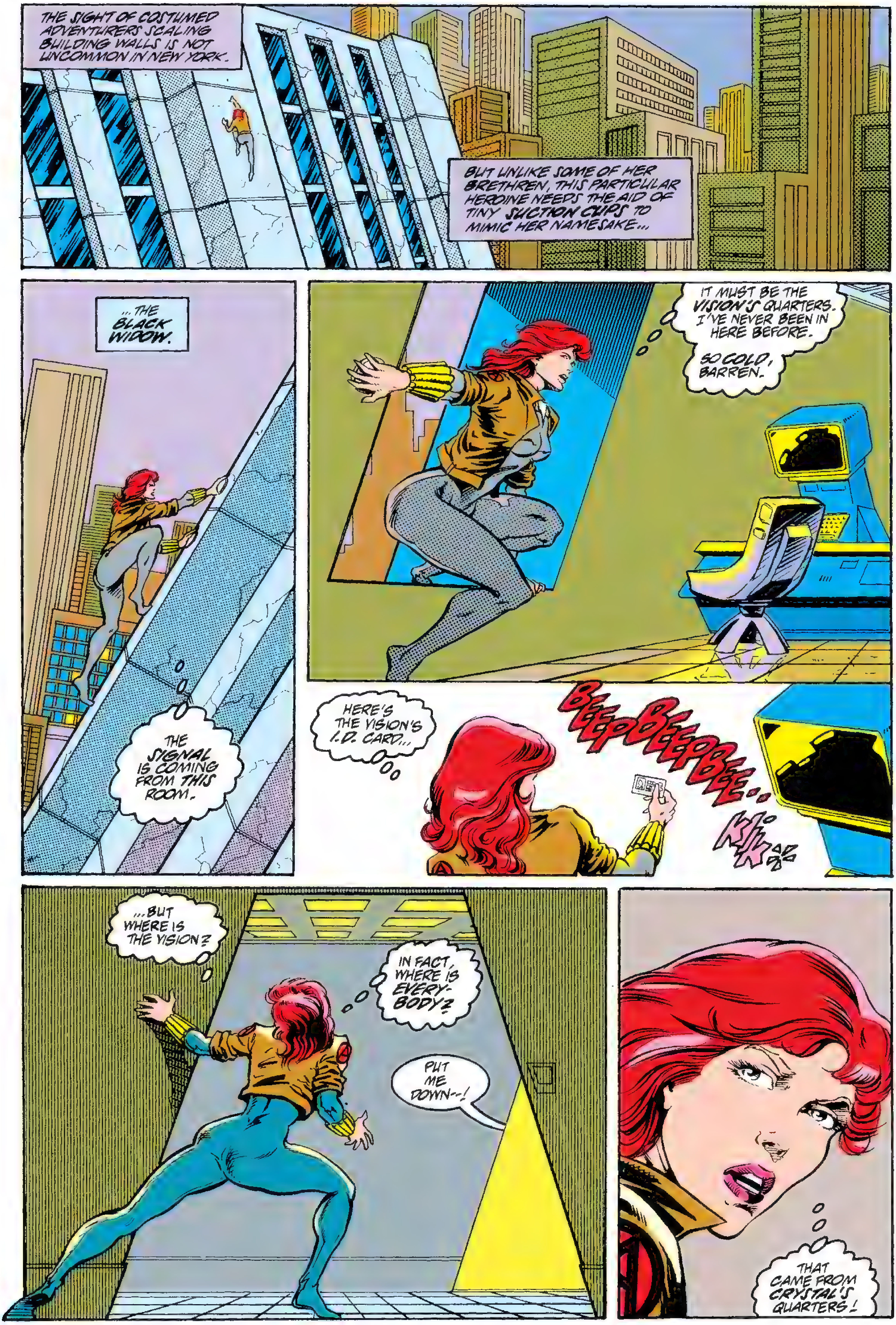

BUT CHANDU CAN ONLY AFFECT WHAT HE SEES...
...FOR ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DOOR, THE VISION'S BODY REMAINS MOSTLY INTACT...
...STILL PROCESSING INFORMATION DICTATED BY THE HEAD.
AVENGERS
FSHAP
BLORP
ENOUGH GAMES, ANDROID! COME TO ME!
HAHAHA! NOW WHO WILL SAVE THE MIGHTY AVENGERS?
PSHHplip
AVENGERS
BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP

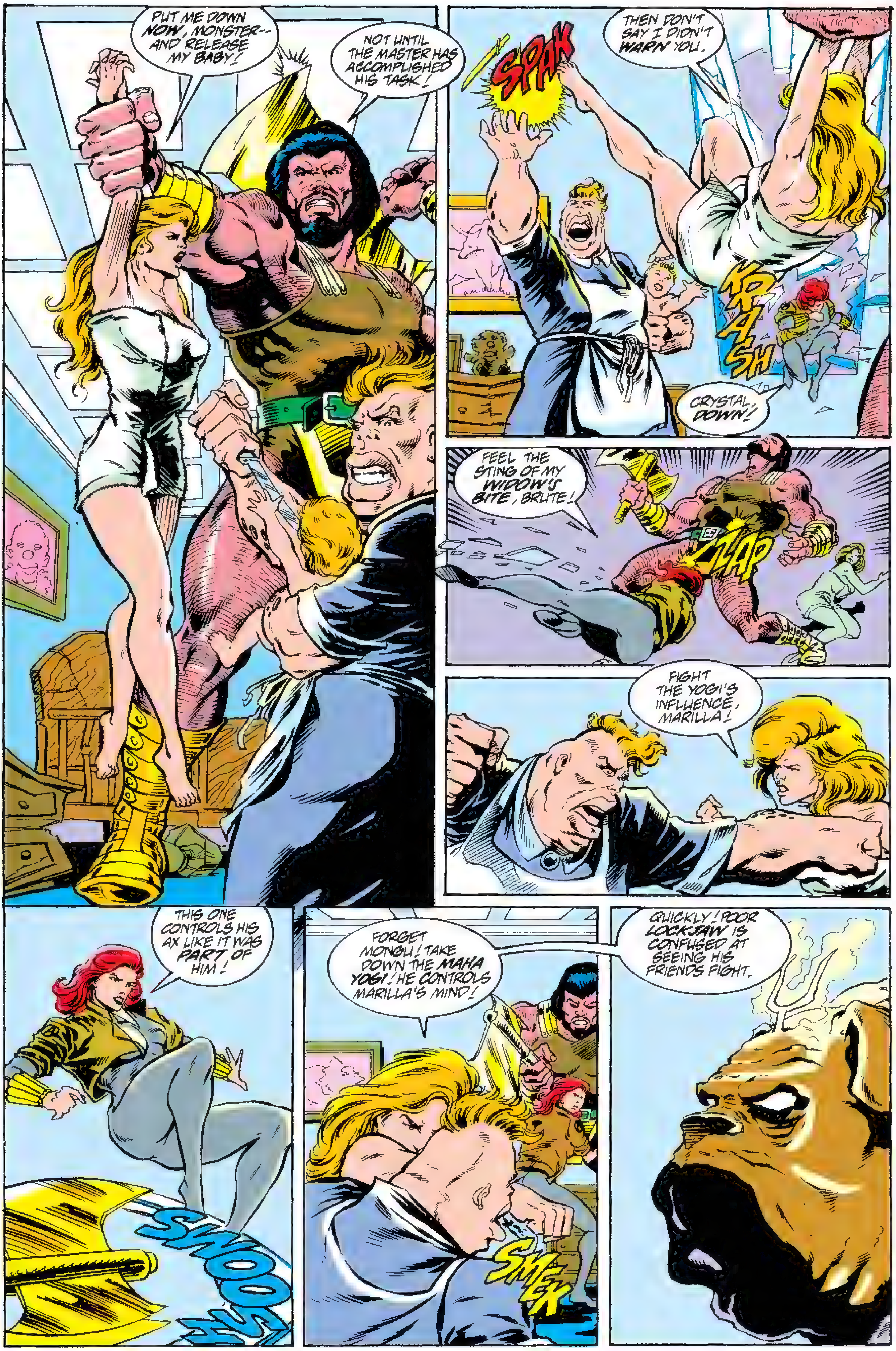

WHITMAN MANOR PERCHES ON ITS ROCKY ROOST, SURVEYING DOWNTOWN WASHINGTON, D.C.
EN GUARDE, BOLD SQUIRE!
NICE PARRY, SEAN.
BUT NEVER LET YOUR GUARD DOWN!
YOU'LL HAVE TO BE QUICKER THAN THAT--
--AND MORE OBSERVANT!
OCH!
REMEMBER, IT IS NOT THE SWORD WHICH MAKES THE MAN.
I-I YIELD, BLACK KNIGHT.

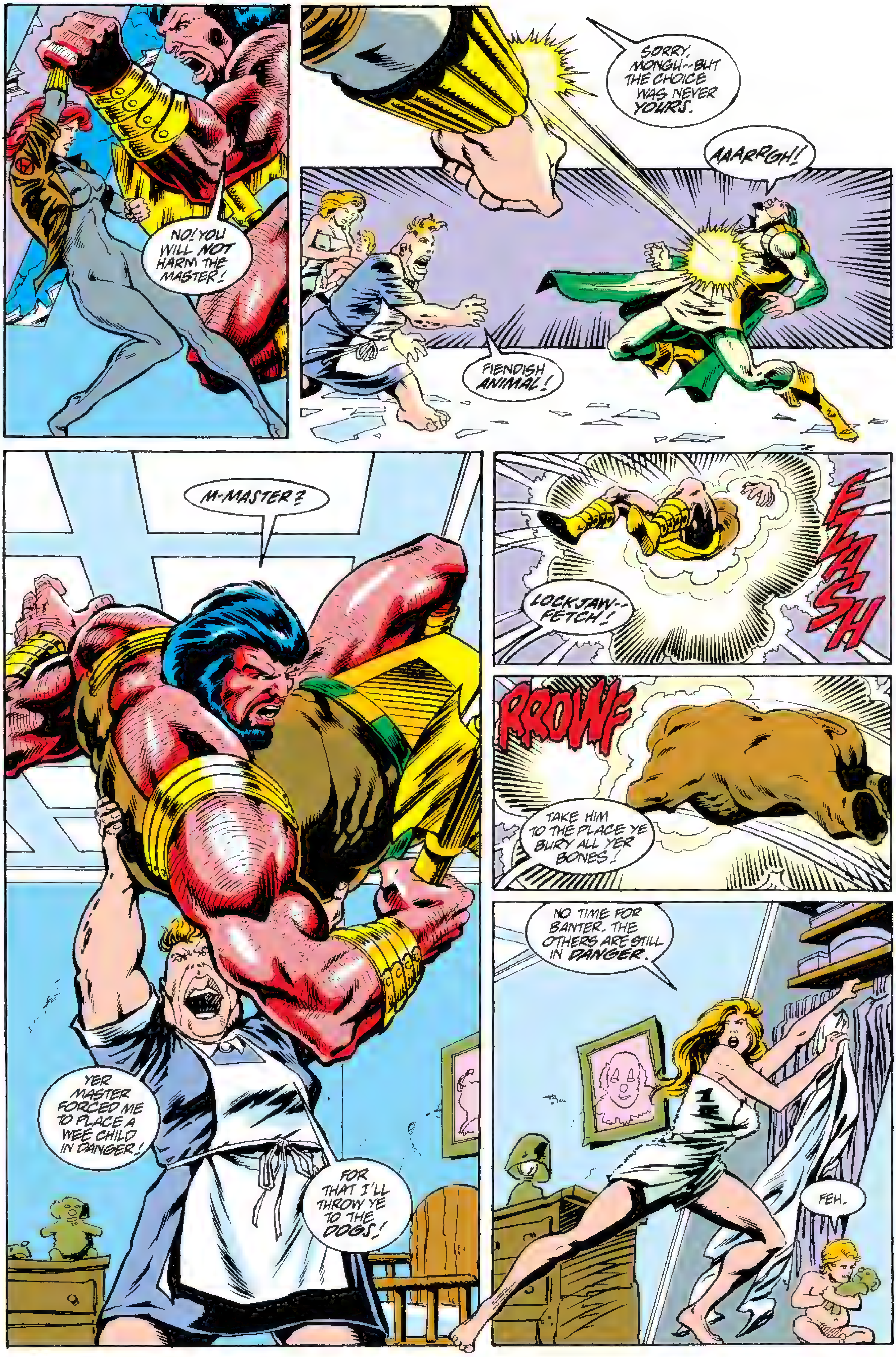

WOULD YE HAVE *KILLED* ME HAD I BEEN A TRUE FOE?
KILLING AN OPPONENT IS *NEVER* THE VIRTUOUS PATH FOR A *KNIGHT.*
YOU WOULD DO WELL TO REMEMBER *SIR PERCY* OF SCANDIA, THE ORIGINAL *BLACK KNIGHT.*
AS YOU MAY RECALL,* SIR PERCY WAS ONE OF *KING ARTHUR'S* KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND TABLE IN THE SIXTH CENTURY.
*SEE THE *BLACK KNIGHT LIMITED SERIES #1-4.* --SIR RALF
ARTHUR'S WIZARD, *MERLIN,* GRANTED THE KNIGHT THIS *EBONY SWORD,* AN ENCHANTED BLADE CONSTRUCTED FROM A METEORITE...
...THE SAME METEORITE INTO WHICH I HAVE PLUNGED THE SWORD--
--IN HOPES OF EVADING ITS *BLOOD CURSE.*
"YOU SEE, THE EBONY SWORD WAS CURSED BY THE *BLOOD* OF SIR PERCY'S VICTIMS DURING HIS SERVICE TO ARTHUR.
"THE CURSE COMPELS THE SWORD'S WIELDER TO SHED *MORE* BLOOD WITH IT.
"I WILL NOT ALLOW THE BLADE TO KILL AGAIN, FOR IT WILL SURELY TURN ITS WIELDER *EVIL.*"

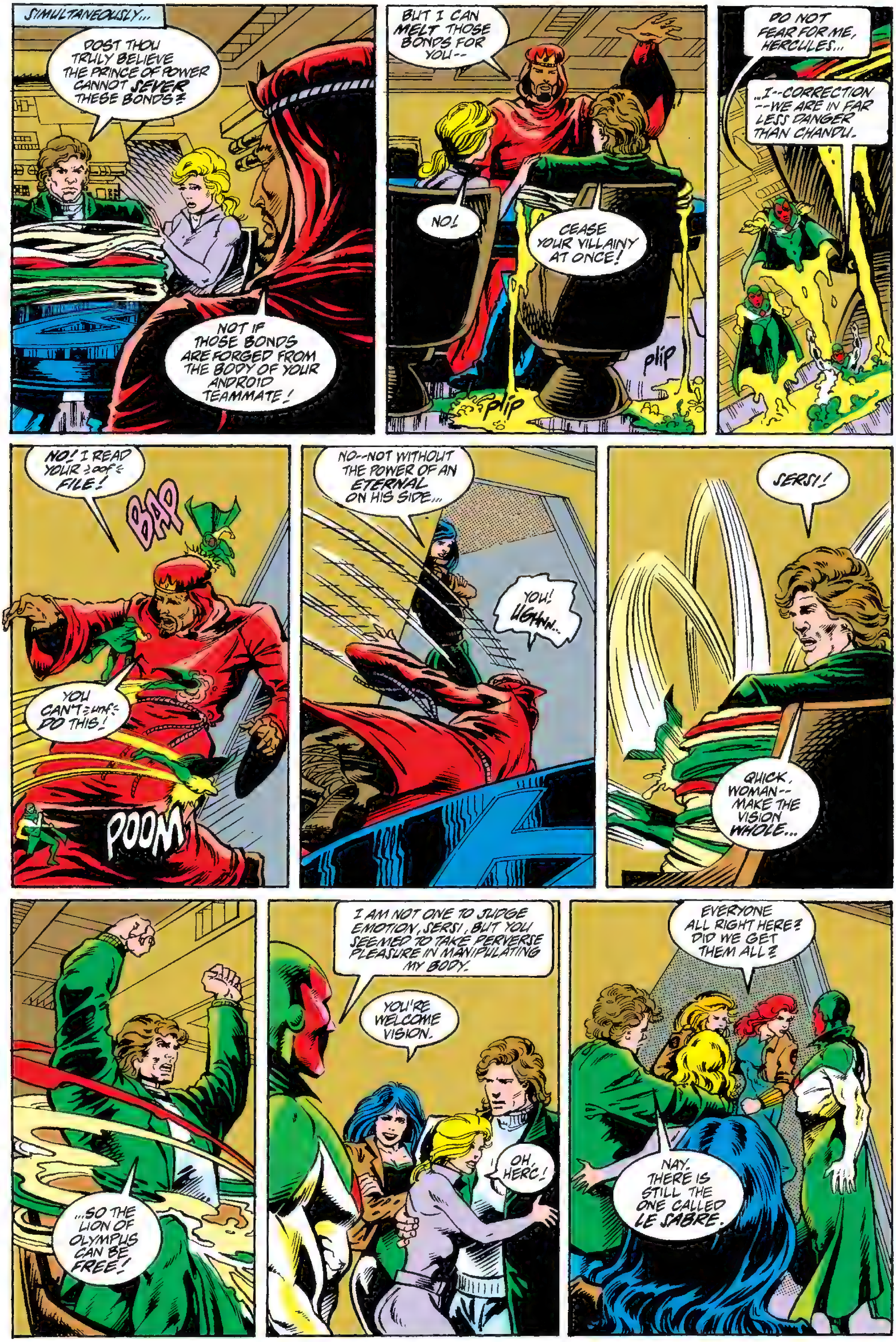

HEED HIM WELL, YOUNG SEAN DOLAN.
M-MISS BENTLEY-- I DINNA KNOW YE WERE LISTENIN'!
HELLO, VICTORIA.
FORGIVE THE INTRUSION, DANE, BUT SINCE SIR PERCY'S SPIRIT--THE SOURCE OF THE EVIL CURSE--HAS RETURNED TO THE BLADE, IT FILLS ME WITH NOTHING BUT DREAD.
I UNDERSTAND, VICTORIA. I TOO REMEMBER PERCY'S PARTING COMMENT...
..."TAKE CARE THAT YOU IMBUE THE SWORD WITH NO FURTHER CURSES OF YOUR OWN."
OCH.


DON'T WORRY, VICKI--ONLY DESCENDANTS OF THE HOUSE OF GARRINGTON CAN PULL THE SWORD FROM THAT METEOR.
BEEP
BEEP
BEEP
THE AVENGERS PRIORITY ALERT!
WE'LL HAVE TO CONTINUE THIS LATER.
CATHERWOOD! IS VALINOR SADDLED?
H-HE HAS GROWN RESTLESS SINCE LAST YOU RODE HIM, MASTER DANE.
BUT YES, HE IS READY.
THEN AWAY, VALINOR! FLY SWIFTLY TO AVENGERS MANSION!
FAREWELL...
...MY LOVE.

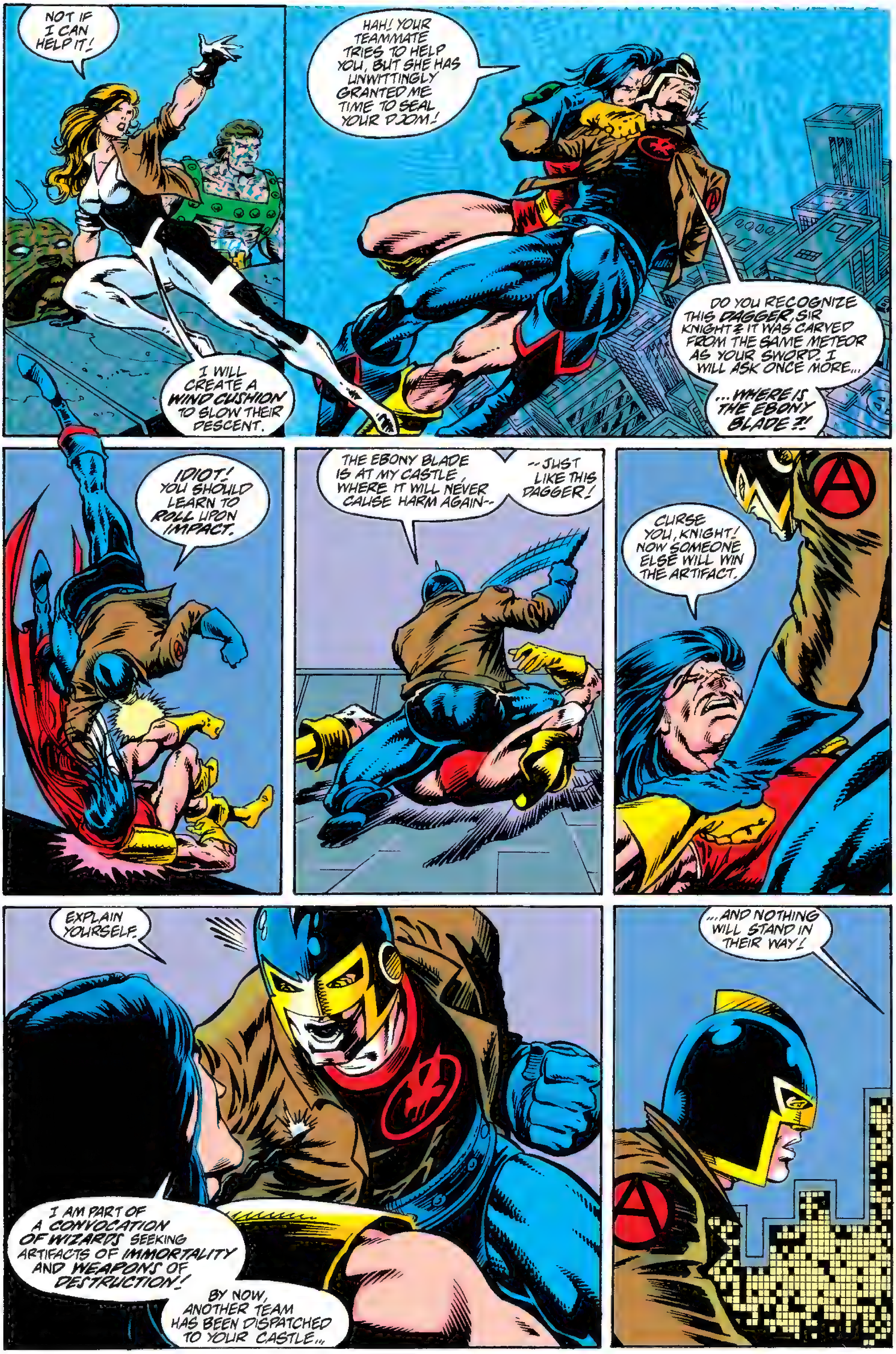

THE SIGHT OF COSTUMED ADVENTURERS SCALING BUILDING WALLS IS NOT UNCOMMON IN NEW YORK.
BUT UNLIKE SOME OF HER BRETHREN, THIS PARTICULAR HEROINE NEEDS THE AID OF TINY SUCTION CUPS TO MIMIC HER NAMESAKE...
...THE BLACK WIDOW.
THE SIGNAL IS COMING FROM THIS ROOM.
IT MUST BE THE VISION'S QUARTERS. I'VE NEVER BEEN IN HERE BEFORE.
SO COLD, BARREN.
HERE'S THE VISION'S I.D. CARD...
BEEPBEEPBEE..
KLIK
...BUT WHERE IS THE VISION?
IN FACT, WHERE IS EVERYBODY?
PUT ME DOWN--!
THAT CAME FROM CRYSTAL'S QUARTERS!

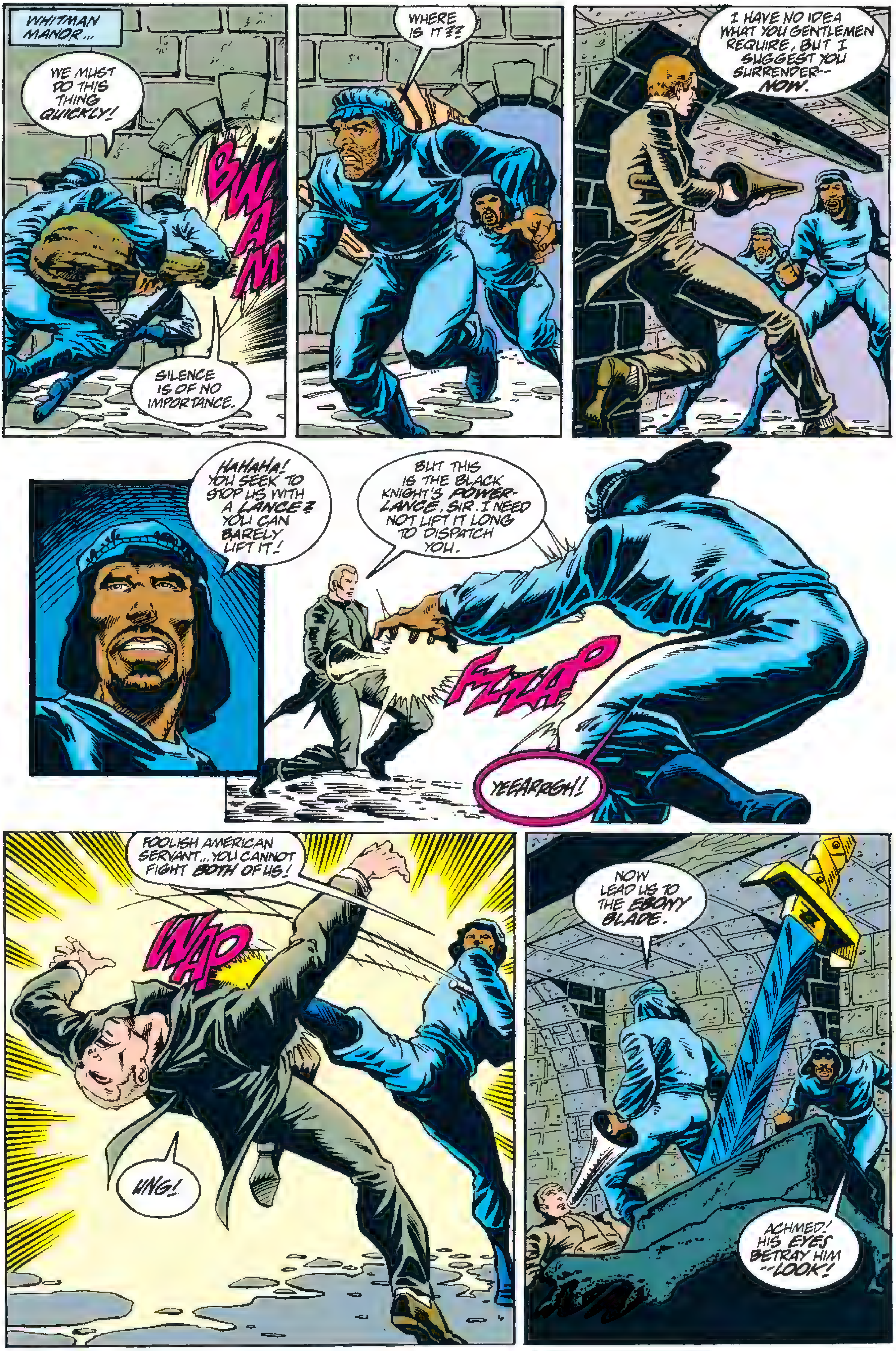

PUT ME DOWN NOW, MONSTER-- AND RELEASE MY BABY!
NOT UNTIL THE MASTER HAS ACCOMPLISHED HIS TASK!
SPAK
THEN DON'T SAY I DIDN'T WARN YOU.
KRASH
CRYSTAL, DOWN!
FEEL THE STING OF MY WIDOW'S BITE, BRUTE!
ZZAP
FIGHT THE YOGI'S INFLUENCE, MARILLA!
THIS ONE CONTROLS HIS AX LIKE IT WAS PART OF HIM!
SWOOSH
FORGET MONGU! TAKE DOWN THE MAHA YOGI! HE CONTROLS MARILLA'S MIND!
SMEK
QUICKLY! POOR LOCKJAW IS CONFUSED AT SEEING HIS FRIENDS FIGHT.


NO! YOU WILL NOT HARM THE MASTER!
SORRY, MONGU--BUT THE CHOICE WAS NEVER YOURS.
AAARRGH!
FIENDISH ANIMAL!
M-MASTER?
YER MASTER FORCED ME TO PLACE A WEE CHILD IN DANGER!
FOR THAT I'LL THROW YE TO THE DOGS!
FLASH
LOCKJAW--FETCH!
RROWF
TAKE HIM TO THE PLACE YE BURY ALL YER BONES!
NO TIME FOR BANTER. THE OTHERS ARE STILL IN DANGER.
FEH.

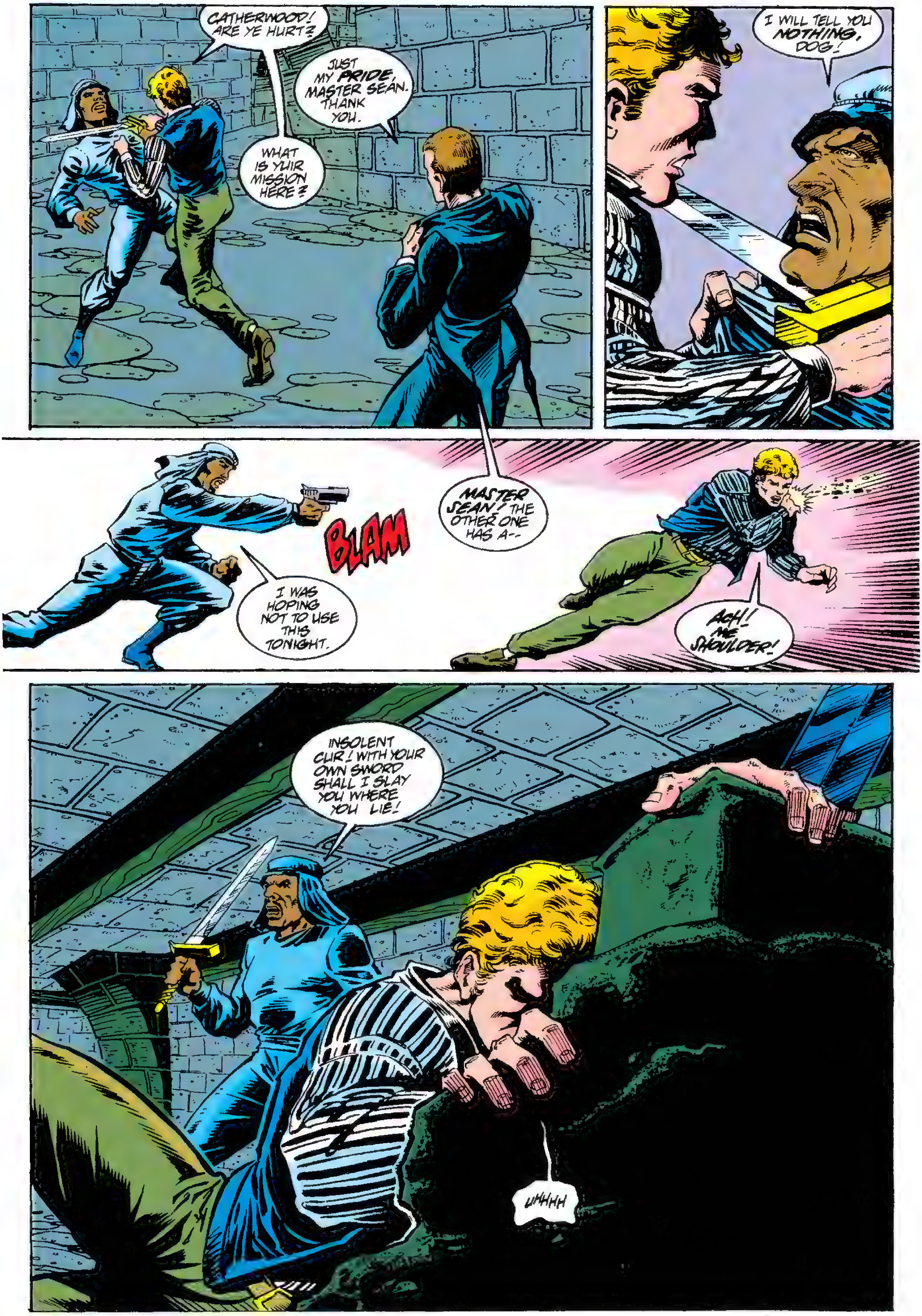

SIMULTANEOUSLY...
DOST THOU TRULY BELIEVE THE PRINCE OF POWER CANNOT SEVER THESE BONDS?
NOT IF THOSE BONDS ARE FORGED FROM THE BODY OF YOUR ANDROID TEAMMATE!
BUT I CAN MELT THOSE BONDS FOR YOU--
NO!
CEASE YOUR VILLAINY AT ONCE!
plip
plip
DO NOT FEAR FOR ME, HERCULES...
...I--CORRECTION --WE ARE IN FAR LESS DANGER THAN CHANDU.
NO! I READ YOUR =oof= FILE!
BAP
YOU CAN'T =unf= DO THIS!
POOM
NO--NOT WITHOUT THE POWER OF AN ETERNAL ON HIS SIDE...
YOU! UGHHH...
SERSI!
QUICK, WOMAN-- MAKE THE VISION WHOLE...
...SO THE LION OF OLYMPUS CAN BE FREE!
I AM NOT ONE TO JUDGE EMOTION, SERSI, BUT YOU SEEMED TO TAKE PERVERSE PLEASURE IN MANIPULATING MY BODY.
YOU'RE WELCOME VISION.
OH, HERC!
EVERYONE ALL RIGHT HERE? DID WE GET THEM ALL?
NAY. THERE IS STILL THE ONE CALLED LE SABRE.

CAREFUL, VALINOR! THE MANSION SEEMS *TOO* QUIET!
NEEIGH
NOT FOR LONG, SIR KNIGHT!
ZZZAK
AMBUSH!
FSHAD
A DAGGER? YOU'LL HAVE TO BE QUICKER THAN THAT-- LE SABRE!
CURSE YOU, BLACK KNIGHT!* WHERE IS YOUR *EBONY BLADE*?!
I TRADED IT IN. I DON'T NEED IT TO DEAL WITH THE LIKES OF *YOU!*
VALINOR-- SEE TO HIS MOUNT!
* THESE TWO SKY RIDERS MET IN *MARVEL SUPER-HEROES* VOL. I #17. --REMINISCING RALF
KA-KRUNCH
NEEGH
IT APPEARS THE BLACK KNIGHT HAS ENGAGED THE LAST PERPETRATOR.
ZOUNDS! THEY ARE *FALLING!*


NOT IF I CAN HELP IT!
I WILL CREATE A **WIND CUSHION** TO SLOW THEIR DESCENT.
HAH! YOUR TEAMMATE TRIES TO HELP YOU, BUT SHE HAS UNWITTINGLY GRANTED ME TIME TO SEAL YOUR DOOM!
DO YOU RECOGNIZE THIS **DAGGER**, SIR KNIGHT? IT WAS CARVED FROM THE SAME METEOR AS YOUR SWORD! I WILL ASK ONCE MORE...
...**WHERE IS THE EBONY BLADE?!**
IDIOT! YOU SHOULD LEARN TO **ROLL UPON IMPACT.**
THE EBONY BLADE IS AT MY CASTLE, WHERE IT WILL NEVER CAUSE HARM AGAIN--
--JUST LIKE THIS DAGGER!
CURSE YOU, KNIGHT! NOW SOMEONE ELSE WILL WIN THE ARTIFACT.
EXPLAIN YOURSELF.
I AM PART OF A **CONVOCATION OF WIZARDS** SEEKING ARTIFACTS OF **IMMORTALITY** AND **WEAPONS OF DESTRUCTION!**
BY NOW, ANOTHER TEAM HAS BEEN DISPATCHED TO YOUR CASTLE...
...AND NOTHING WILL STAND IN THEIR WAY!

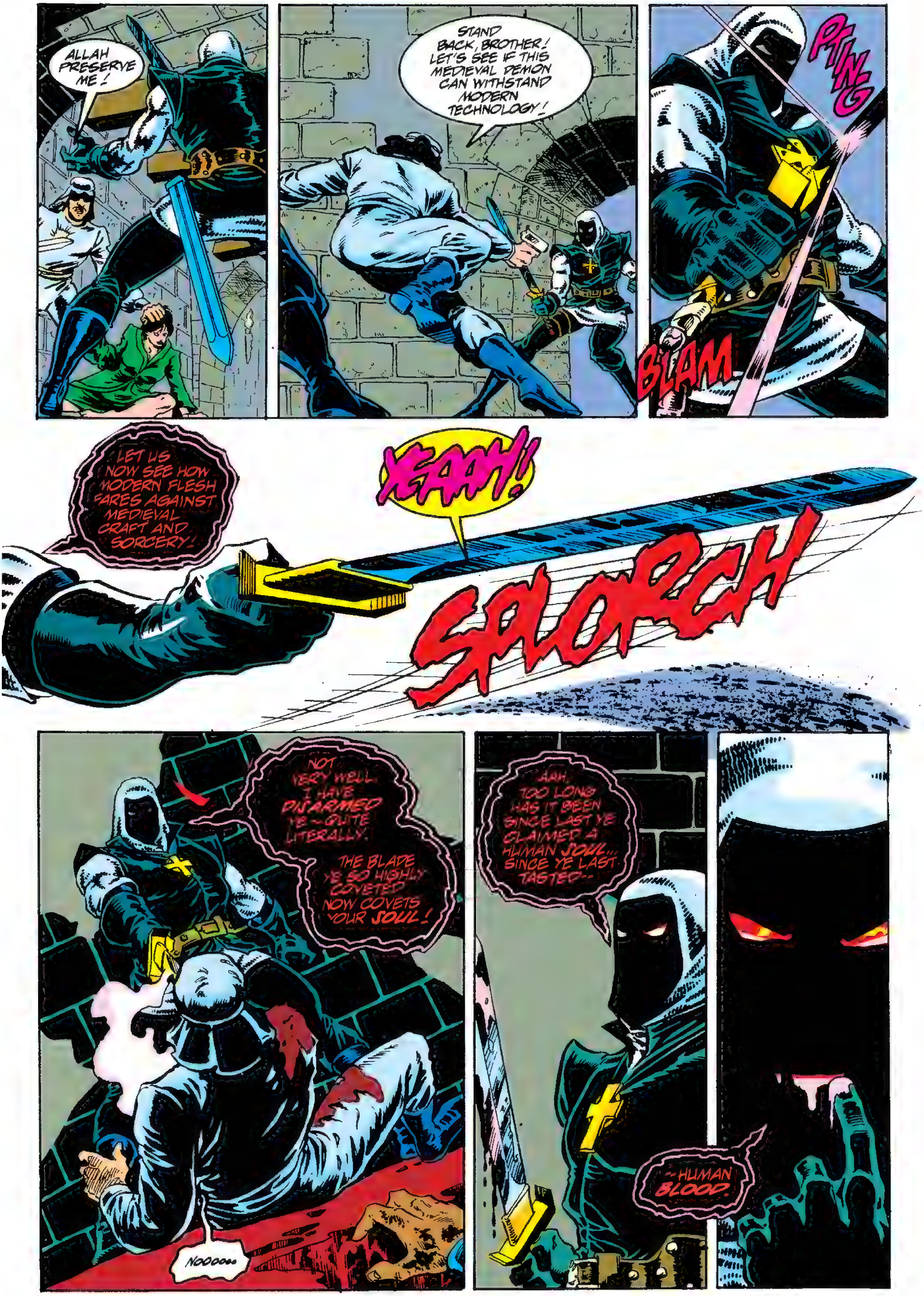

WHITMAN MANOR...
WE MUST DO THIS THING QUICKLY!
BWAM
SILENCE IS OF NO IMPORTANCE.
WHERE IS IT??
I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT YOU GENTLEMEN REQUIRE, BUT I SUGGEST YOU SURRENDER-- NOW.
HAHAHA! YOU SEEK TO STOP US WITH A LANCE? YOU CAN BARELY LIFT IT!
BUT THIS IS THE BLACK KNIGHT'S POWER-LANCE, SIR. I NEED NOT LIFT IT LONG TO DISPATCH YOU.
FZZAP
YEEARRGH!
FOOLISH AMERICAN SERVANT... YOU CANNOT FIGHT BOTH OF US!
WAP
UNG!
NOW LEAD US TO THE EBONY BLADE.
ACHMED! HIS EYES BETRAY HIM --LOOK!

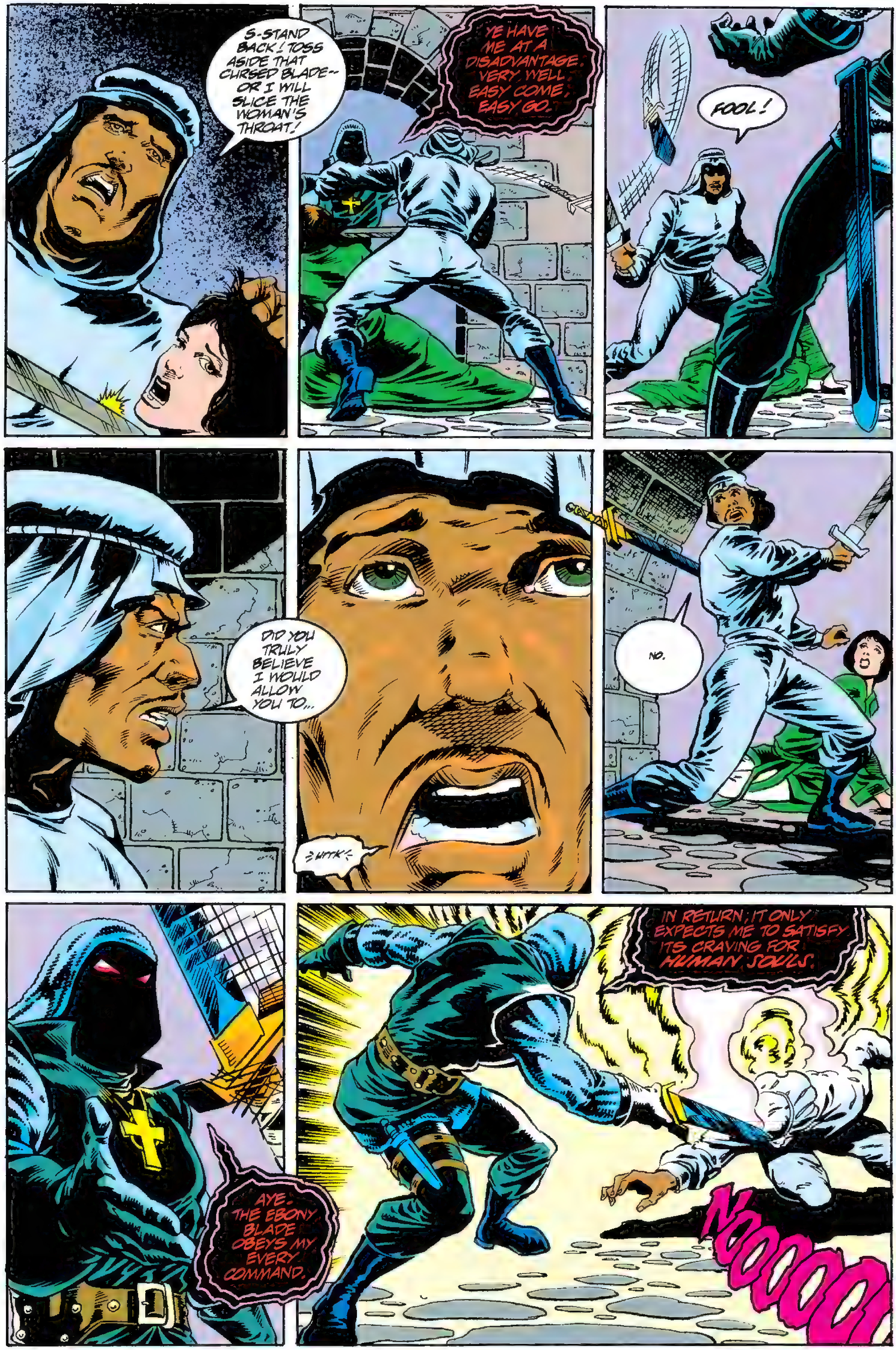
=mnf= IT APPEARS TO BE--STUCK.
'TIS YE WHO SHALL BE STUCK--
--ON THE END O' ME BLADE!
ACHMED--KILL HIM!
YE'LL HAVE TO DO BETTER'N THAT TO BEST THE SQUIRE O' THE BLACK KNIGHT!
HE LEAPS LIKE A JACKAL IN HEAT!
FZZAP
PARRY.
THRUST.
DISARM.

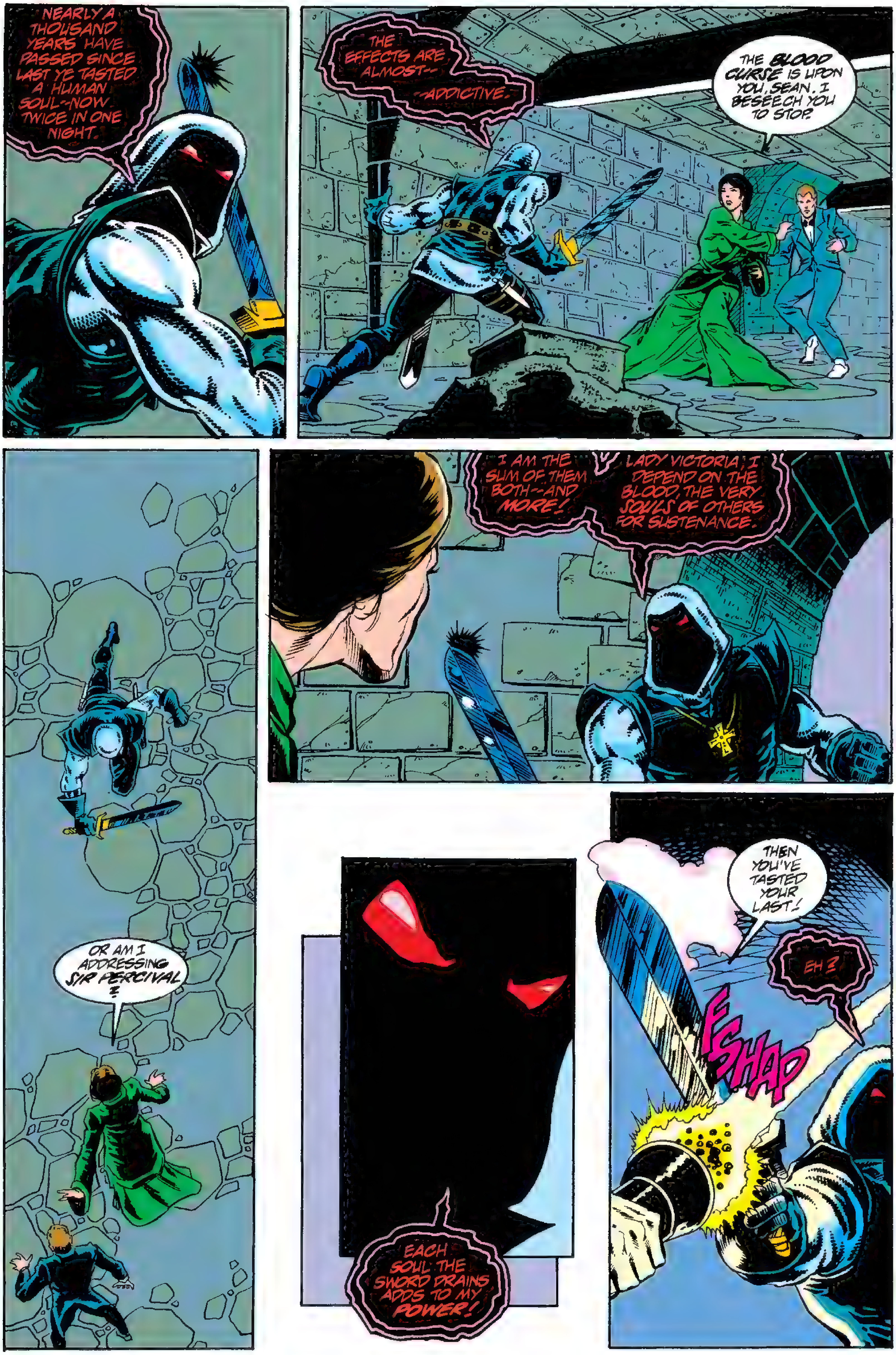

CATHERWOOD! ARE YE HURT?
JUST MY PRIDE, MASTER SEAN. THANK YOU.
WHAT IS YUIR MISSION HERE?
I WILL TELL YOU NOTHING, DOG!
MASTER SEAN! THE OTHER ONE HAS A--
BLAM
I WAS HOPING NOT TO USE THIS TONIGHT.
AGH! ME SHOULDER!
INSOLENT CUR! WITH YOUR OWN SWORD SHALL I SLAY YOU WHERE YOU LIE!
UHHHH

STOP THIS AT ONCE!
I HAVE SUMMONED THE AUTHORITIES!
EVEN IF THAT WERE TRUE, WOMAN, IT WOULD TAKE THEM A WHILE TO ASCEND TO THIS REMOTE CASTLE...
...ENOUGH TIME TO GET WHAT I WANT!
NOW TELL ME, WOMAN, HOW DO I REMOVE THE SWORD?
GAKK -- ONLY THOSE FOUND WORTHY KOFF DESTINED TO INHERIT THE GARRINGTON MANTLE -- CAN PULL THE BLADE FROM ITS MANTLE.
RRRIP
ENOUGH LIES!
I TOLD YOU -- I STILL HAVE ENOUGH TIME TO GET WHAT I WANT!
NO!

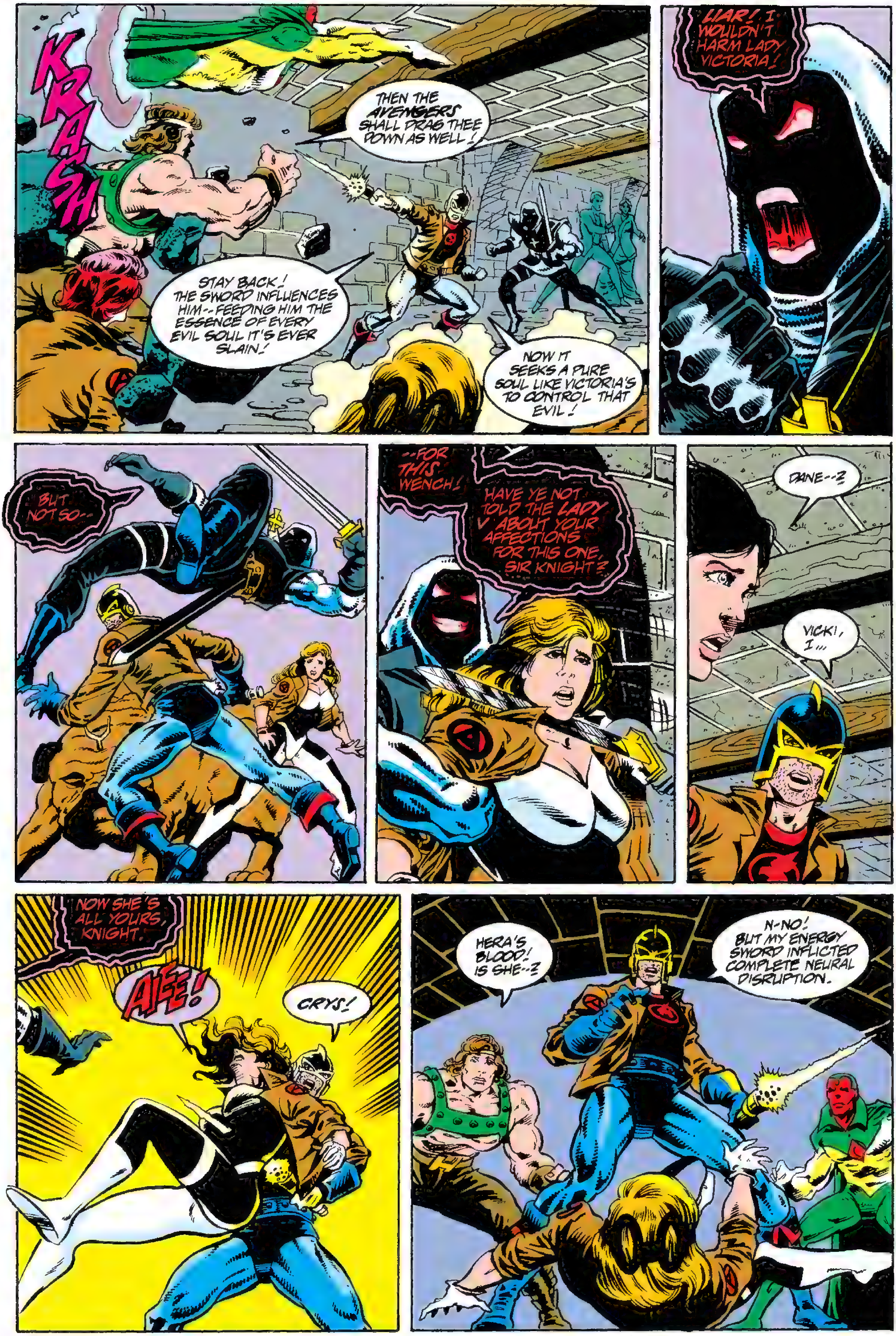
PLEASE HELP ME!
LADY VICTORIA! SHE CALLS TO ME IN MY MIND!
AND THE SWORD-- IT TOO BECKONS ME...
...AS THOUGH...
IT IS MINE!
INFIDELS FACE ME! YE NO LONGER CONFRONT AN OLD MAN, A MAIDEN FAIR, OR A SIMPERING CHILD.


ALLAH PRESERVE ME!
STAND BACK, BROTHER! LET'S SEE IF THIS MEDIEVAL DEMON CAN WITHSTAND MODERN TECHNOLOGY!
PTING
BLAM
LET US NOW SEE HOW MODERN FLESH FARES AGAINST MEDIEVAL CRAFT AND SORCERY!
YEAAH!
SPLORCH
NOT VERY WELL. I HAVE DISARMED YE -- QUITE LITERALLY.
THE BLADE YE SO HIGHLY COVETED NOW COVETS YOUR SOUL!
NOOOOO...
AAH. TOO LONG HAS IT BEEN SINCE LAST YE CLAIMED A HUMAN SOUL... SINCE YE LAST TASTED--
--HUMAN BLOOD.

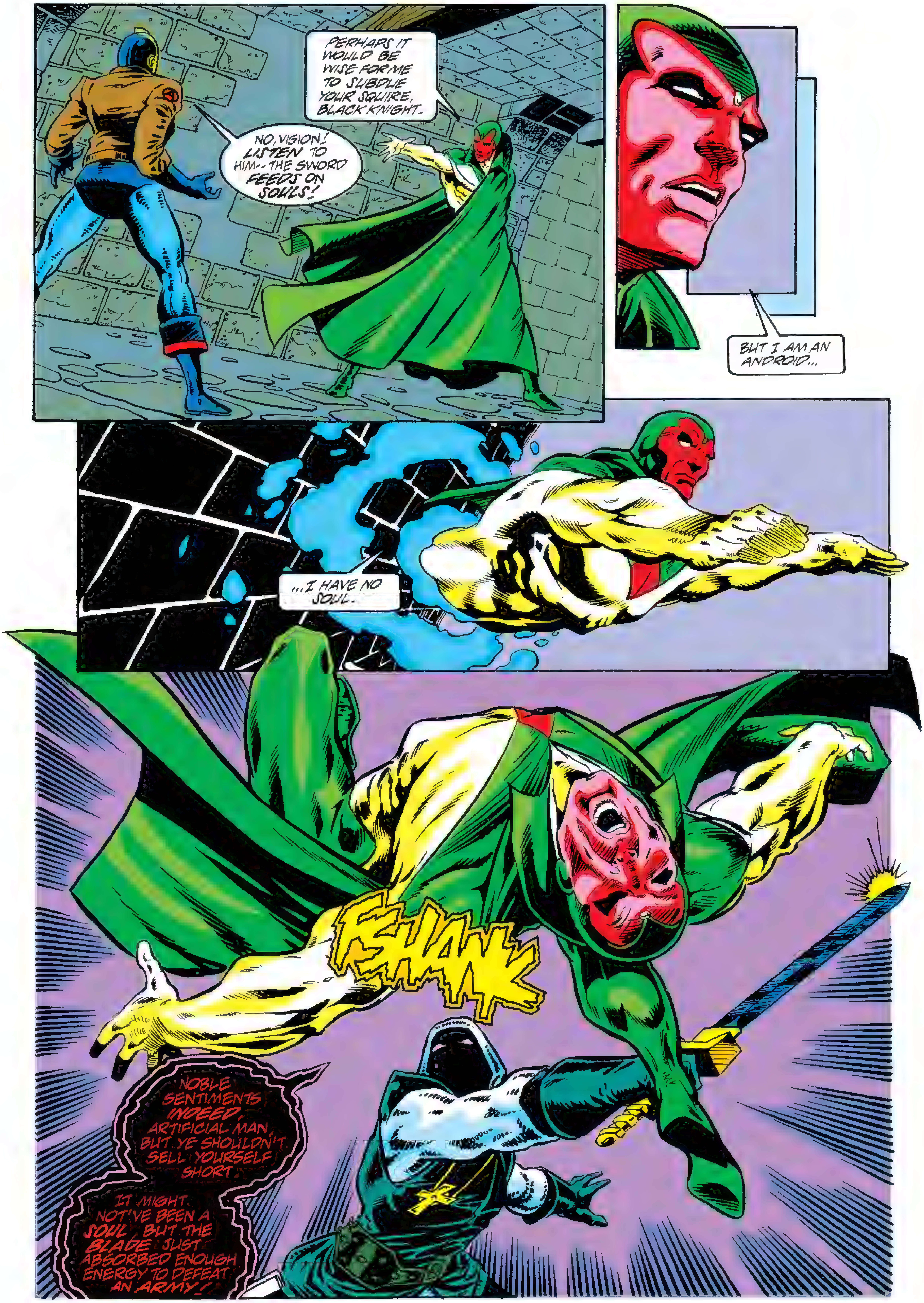

S-STAND BACK! TOSS ASIDE THAT CURSED BLADE-- OR I WILL SLICE THE WOMAN'S THROAT!
YE HAVE ME AT A DISADVANTAGE. VERY WELL. EASY COME, EASY GO.
FOOL!
DID YOU TRULY BELIEVE I WOULD ALLOW YOU TO...
UNK
NO.
AYE. THE EBONY BLADE OBEYS MY EVERY COMMAND.
IN RETURN, IT ONLY EXPECTS ME TO SATISFY ITS CRAVING FOR HUMAN SOULS.
NOOOOO!

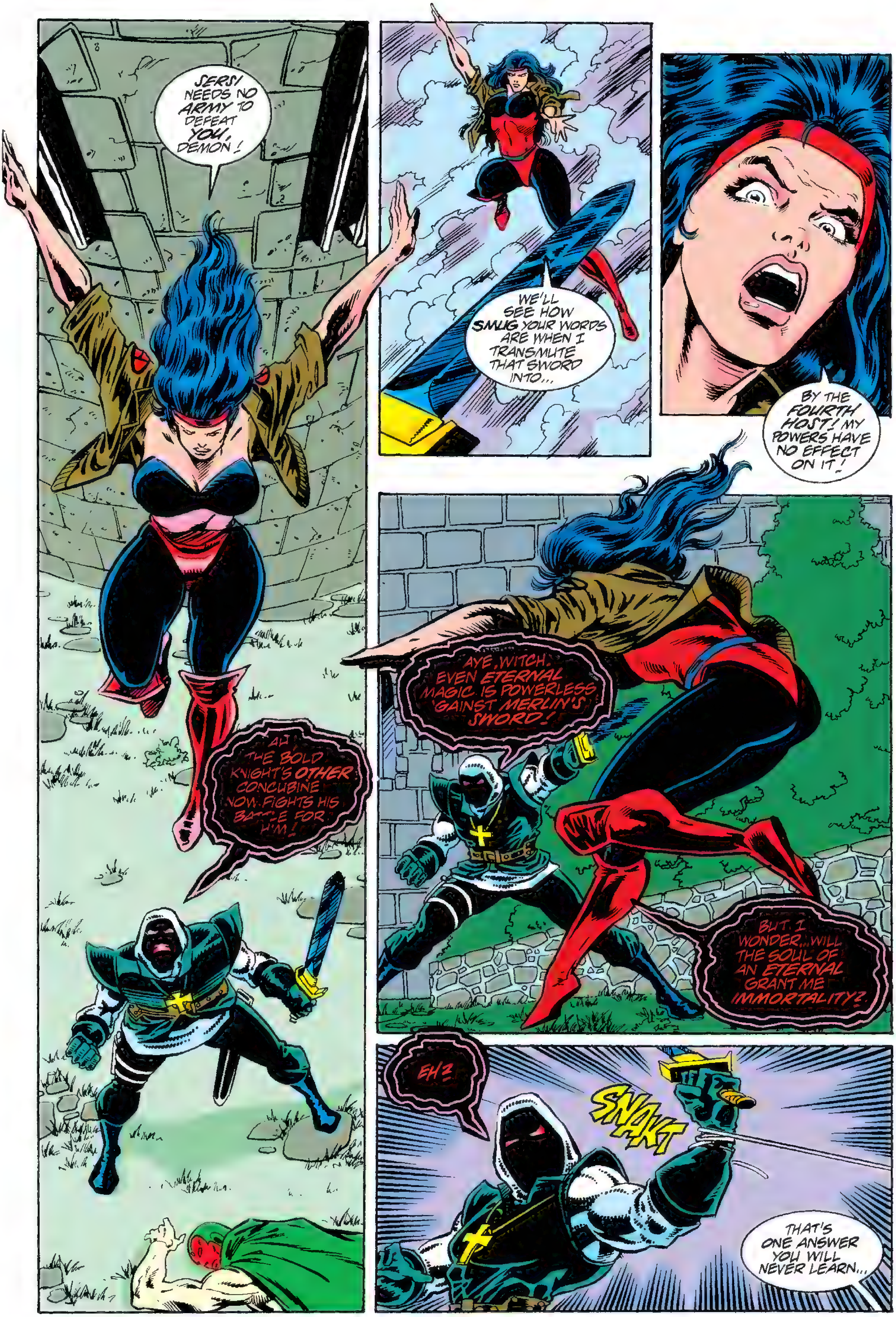

NEARLY A THOUSAND YEARS HAVE PASSED SINCE LAST YE TASTED A HUMAN SOUL--NOW TWICE IN ONE NIGHT.
THE EFFECTS ARE ALMOST--
--ADDICTIVE.
THE BLOOD CURSE IS UPON YOU, SEAN. I BESEECH YOU TO STOP!
OR AM I ADDRESSING SIR PERCIVAL?
I AM THE SUM OF THEM BOTH--AND MORE!
LADY VICTORIA, I DEPEND ON THE BLOOD, THE VERY SOULS OF OTHERS FOR SUSTENANCE.
EACH SOUL THE SWORD DRAINS ADDS TO MY POWER!
THEN YOU'VE TASTED YOUR LAST!
EH?
FSHAP

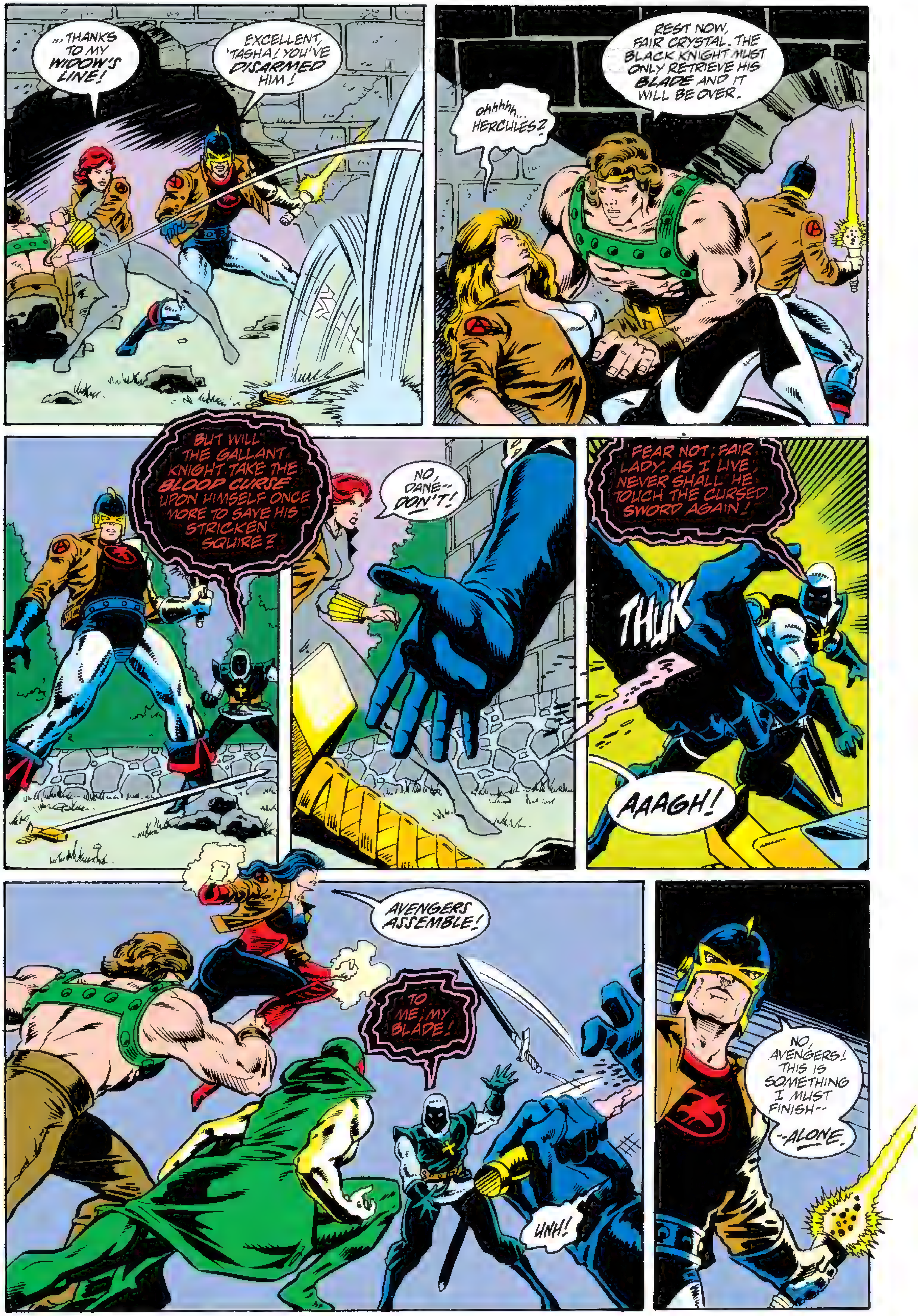
I HEARD EVERYTHING, SEAN--AND I WANT TO HELP.
I DINNA NEED YOUR SORT O' HELP!
FSHAP
WHAT? YOU ENGAGE *ME* IN SWORDPLAY?
JUST BECAUSE *YE* COULDN'T HANDLE THE EBONY BLADE, SIR KNIGHT, DOESN'T MEAN THAT I...
AAIEE!
I'VE PARALYZED YOUR SWORD ARM, SEAN. NOW GIVE ME THE BLADE!
YE WANT IT, YE CAN *HAVE* IT!
FOOL! YE TAUGHT ME YOURSELF TO DUEL WITH BOTH HANDS!
SLITCH
AKK!
WITH EACH DROP O' *BLOOD* YE SPILL, THE EBONY SWORD DRAGS A PIECE O' YOUR SOUL WITH IT!


KRASH
THEN THE AVENGERS SHALL DRAG THEE DOWN AS WELL!
STAY BACK! THE SWORD INFLUENCES HIM--FEEDING HIM THE ESSENCE OF EVERY EVIL SOUL IT'S EVER SLAIN!
NOW IT SEEKS A PURE SOUL LIKE VICTORIA'S TO CONTROL THAT EVIL!
LIAR! I WOULDN'T HARM LADY VICTORIA!
BUT NOT SO--
--FOR THIS WENCH!
HAVE YE NOT TOLD THE LADY V ABOUT YOUR AFFECTIONS FOR THIS ONE, SIR KNIGHT?
DANE--?
VICKI, I...
NOW SHE'S ALL YOURS, KNIGHT.
AIEE!
CRYS!
HERA'S BLOOD! IS SHE--?
N-NO! BUT MY ENERGY SWORD INFLICTED COMPLETE NEURAL DISRUPTION.

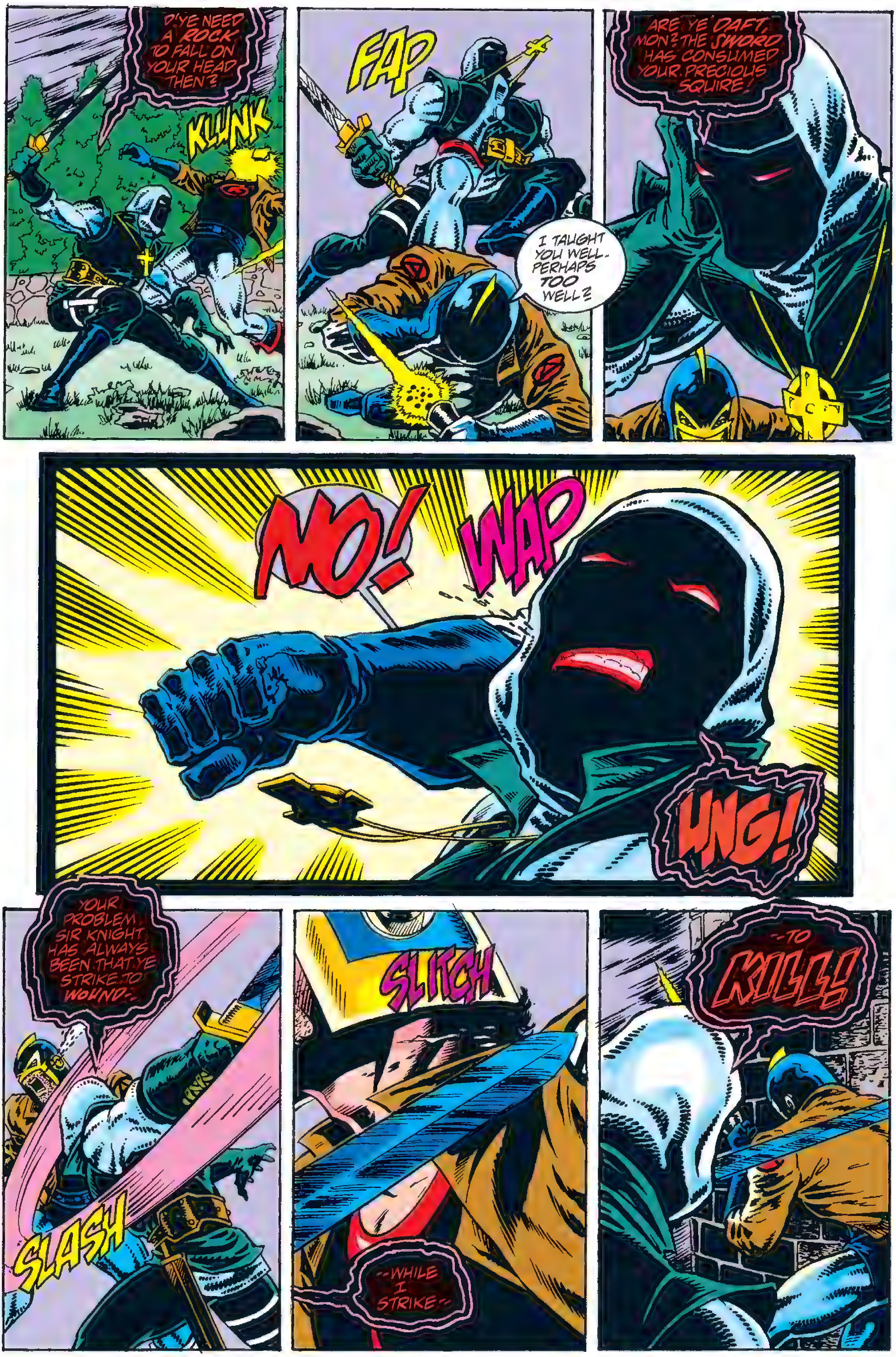
FIEND! YOU WOULD ATTACK A HELPLESS FEMALE?
BWAM
HAVE AT THEE THEN!
PREPARE THYSELF FOR THE GIFT OF...HOLD!
WHAT IS THIS WEAKNESS WHICH OVERCOMES ME?
OOF!
GREAT ZEUS! THY BLADE CUT ME!
AYE, GODLING. EVEN YE ARE VULNERABLE TO THE EBONY BLADE--
--FOR EVEN YE HAVE A SOUL!

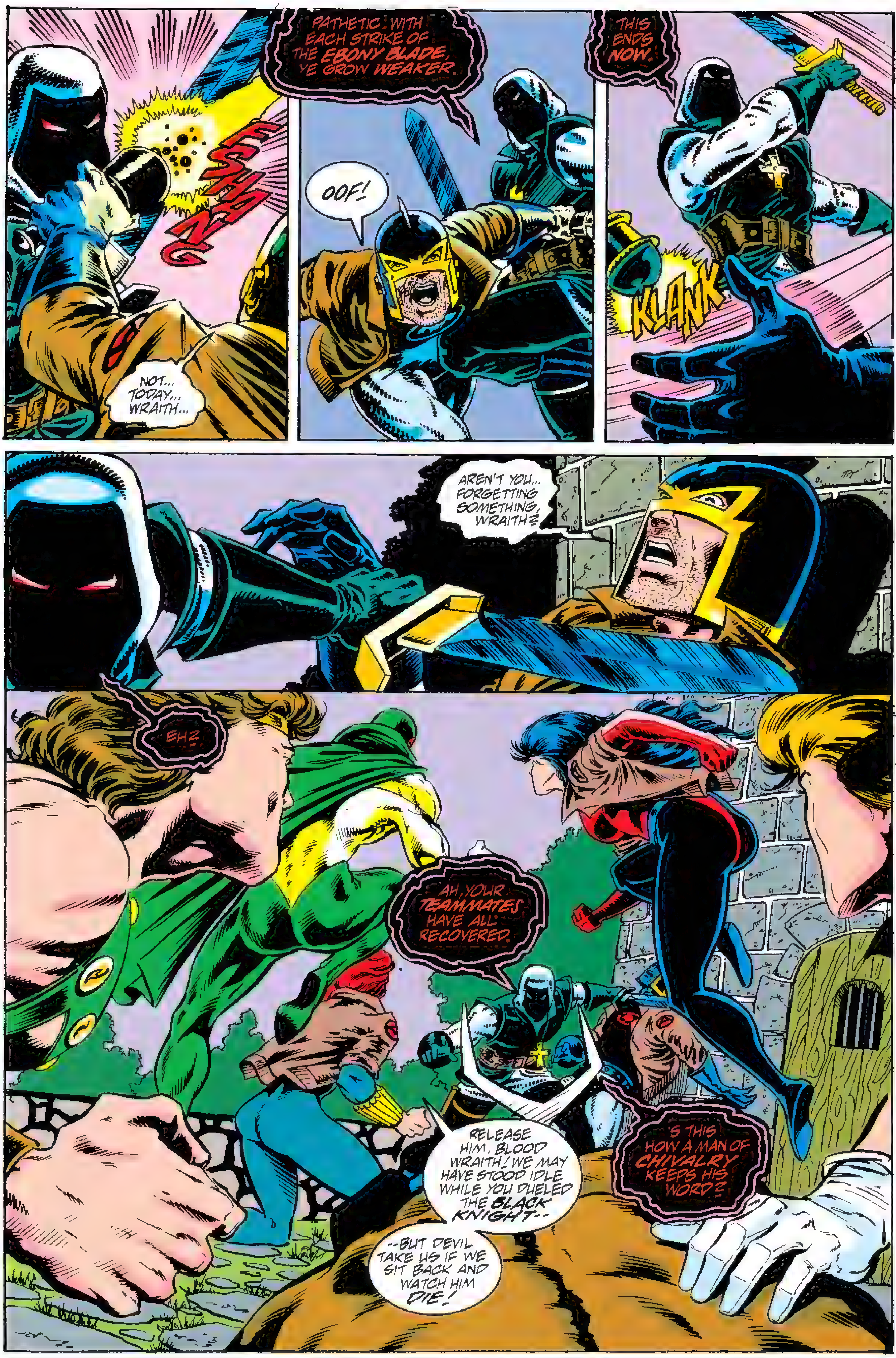

PERHAPS IT WOULD BE WISE FOR ME TO SUBDUE YOUR SQUIRE, BLACK KNIGHT.
NO, VISION! LISTEN TO HIM-- THE SWORD FEEDS ON SOULS!
BUT I AM AN ANDROID...
...I HAVE NO SOUL.
FSHAK
NOBLE SENTIMENTS INDEED, ARTIFICIAL MAN, BUT YE SHOULDN'T SELL YOURSELF SHORT.
IT MIGHT NOT'VE BEEN A SOUL, BUT THE BLADE JUST ABSORBED ENOUGH ENERGY TO DEFEAT AN ARMY!

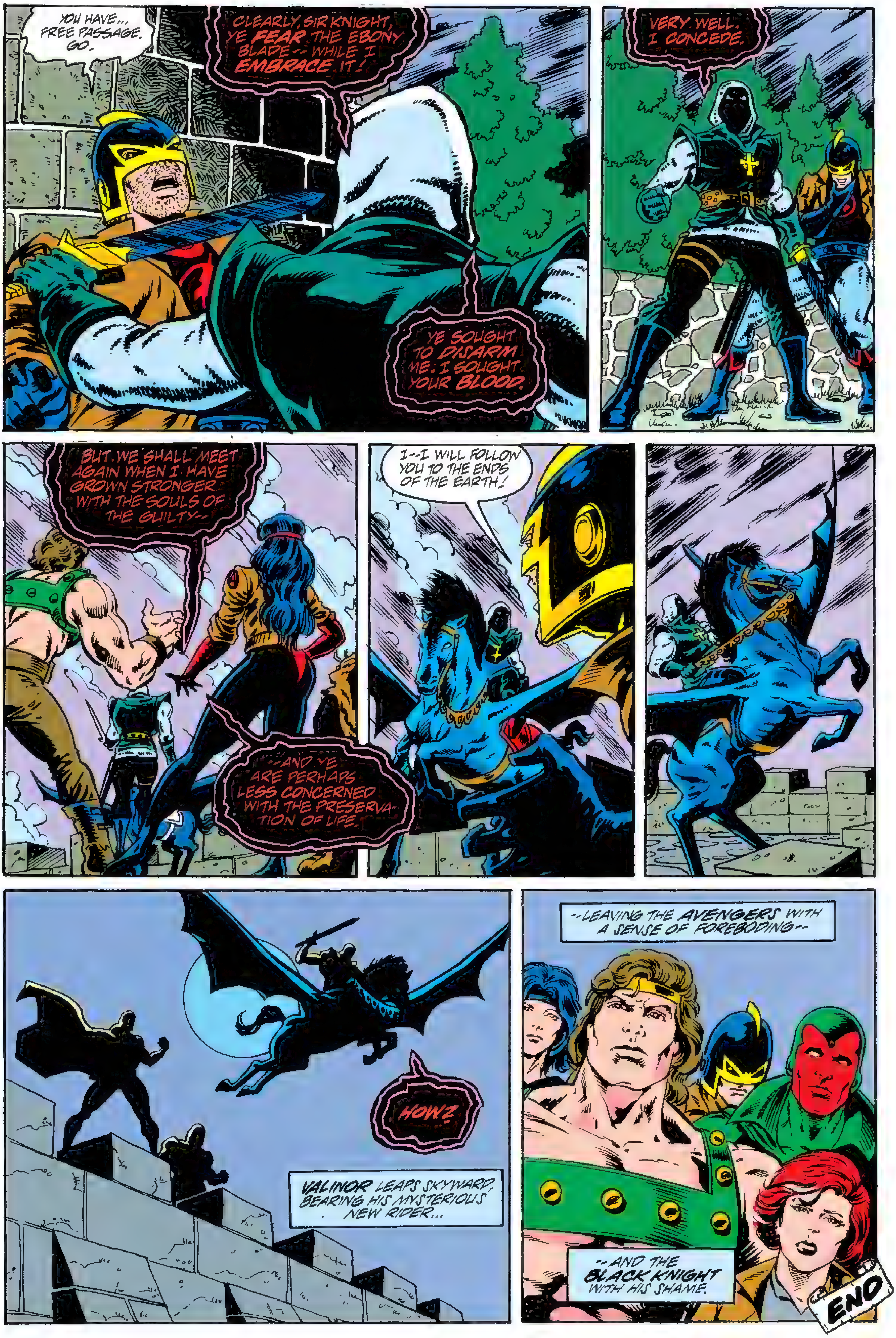

SERSI NEEDS NO ARMY TO DEFEAT YOU, DEMON!
AH! THE BOLD KNIGHT'S OTHER CONCUBINE NOW FIGHTS HIS BATTLE FOR HIM!
WE'LL SEE HOW SMUG YOUR WORDS ARE WHEN I TRANSMUTE THAT SWORD INTO...
BY THE FOURTH HOST! MY POWERS HAVE NO EFFECT ON IT!
AYE, WITCH. EVEN ETERNAL MAGIC IS POWERLESS 'GAINST MERLIN'S SWORD!
BUT I WONDER...WILL THE SOUL OF AN ETERNAL GRANT ME IMMORTALITY?
EH?
SNAKT
THAT'S ONE ANSWER YOU WILL NEVER LEARN...

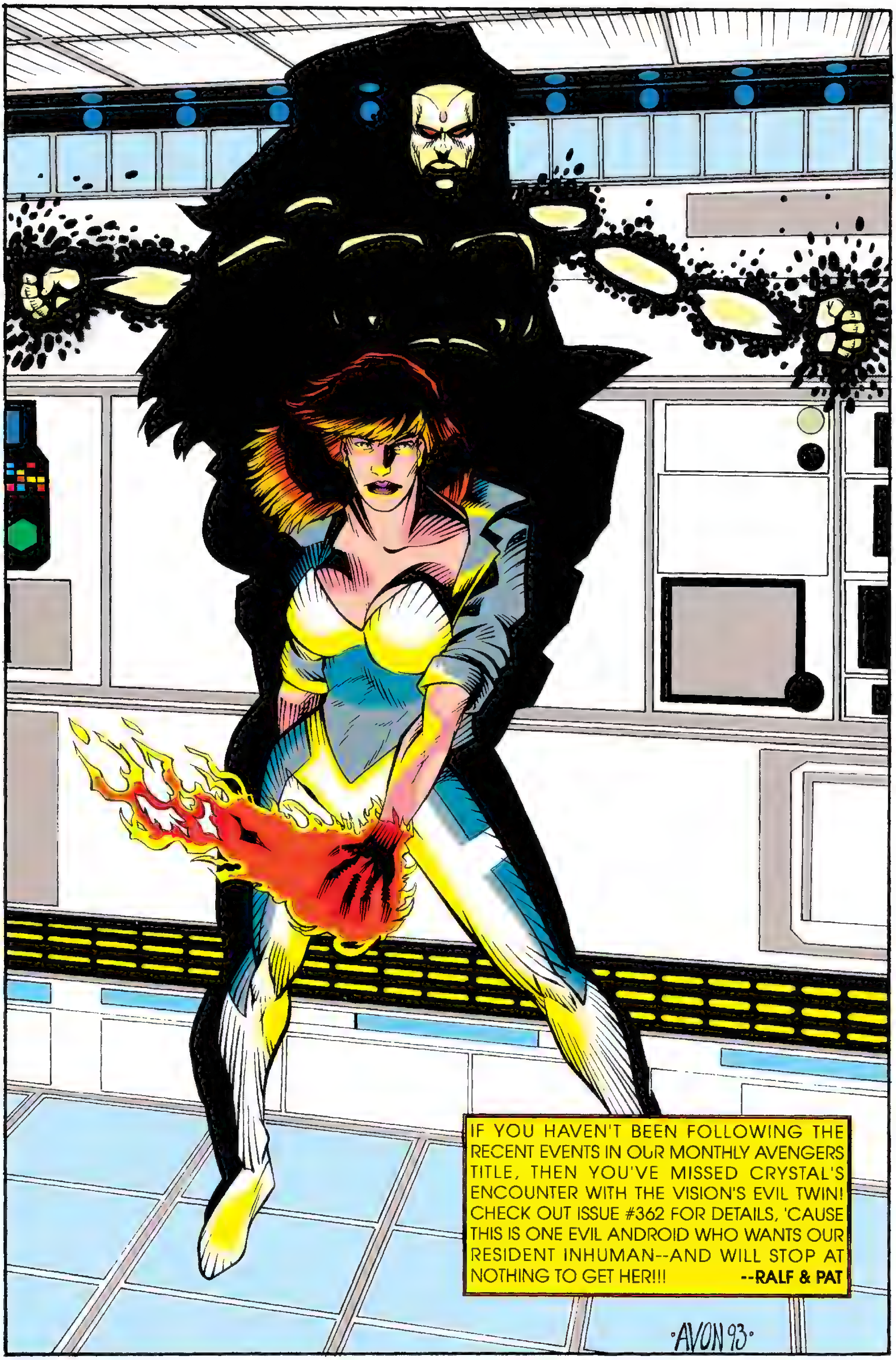

...THANKS TO MY WIDOW'S LINE!
EXCELLENT, 'TASHA! YOU'VE DISARMED HIM!
REST NOW, FAIR CRYSTAL. THE BLACK KNIGHT MUST ONLY RETRIEVE HIS BLADE AND IT WILL BE OVER.
ohhhhh... HERCULES?
BUT WILL THE GALLANT KNIGHT TAKE THE BLOOD CURSE UPON HIMSELF ONCE MORE TO SAVE HIS STRICKEN SQUIRE?
NO, DANE-- DON'T!
FEAR NOT, FAIR LADY. AS I LIVE, NEVER SHALL HE TOUCH THE CURSED SWORD AGAIN!
THUK
AAAGH!
AVENGERS ASSEMBLE!
TO ME, MY BLADE!
UNH!
NO, AVENGERS! THIS IS SOMETHING I MUST FINISH--
--ALONE.

SQUIRE, HEED YOUR KNIGHT-- SHEATHE YOUR SWORD!
YE ARE MY MASTER NO LONGER.
I WAS NEVER YOUR MASTER, SEAN, JUST YOUR FRIEND.
AND I AM NO LONGER SEAN.
FSHAP
FSHANG
I SEE THAT NOW. YOU'RE JUST A WRAITH OF YOUR FORMER SELF.
A BLOOD WRAITH!
NO! I REFUSE TO BELIEVE THAT!

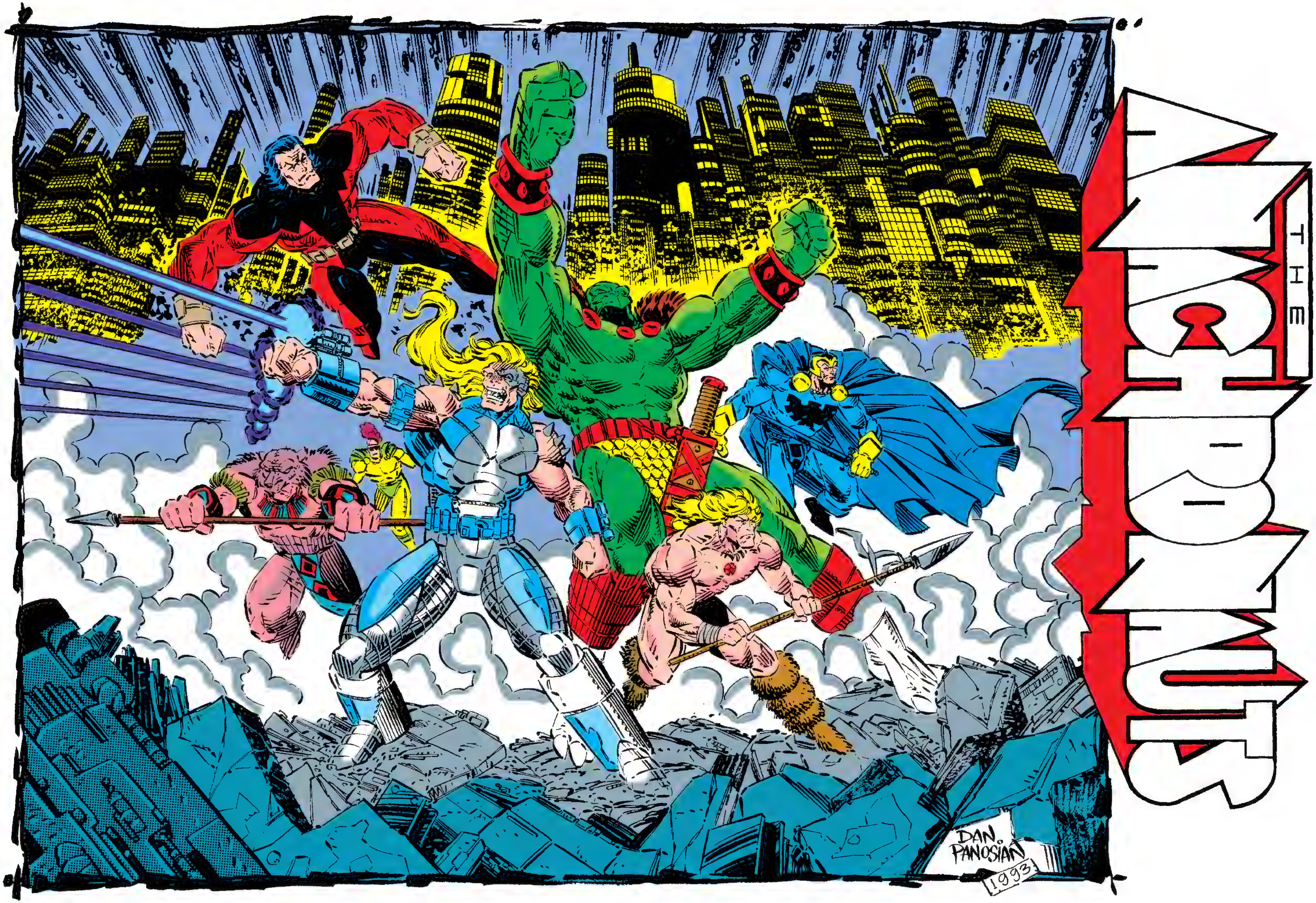

D'YE NEED A ROCK TO FALL ON YOUR HEAD THEN?
KLUNK
FAP
I TAUGHT YOU WELL. PERHAPS TOO WELL?
ARE YE DAFT, MON? THE SWORD HAS CONSUMED YOUR PRECIOUS SQUIRE!
NO!
WAP
UNG!
YOUR PROBLEM SIR KNIGHT HAS ALWAYS BEEN THAT YE STRIKE TO WOUND--
SLASH
SLITCH
--WHILE I STRIKE--
--TO KILL!


SHANG
NOT... TODAY... WRAITH...
PATHETIC. WITH EACH STRIKE OF THE EBONY BLADE, YE GROW WEAKER.
OOF!
THIS ENDS NOW.
KLANK
AREN'T YOU... FORGETTING SOMETHING, WRAITH?
EH?
AH, YOUR TEAMMATES HAVE ALL RECOVERED.
RELEASE HIM, BLOOD WRAITH! WE MAY HAVE STOOD IDLE WHILE YOU DUELED THE BLACK KNIGHT--
--BUT DEVIL TAKE US IF WE SIT BACK AND WATCH HIM DIE!
'S THIS HOW A MAN OF CHIVALRY KEEPS HIS WORD?

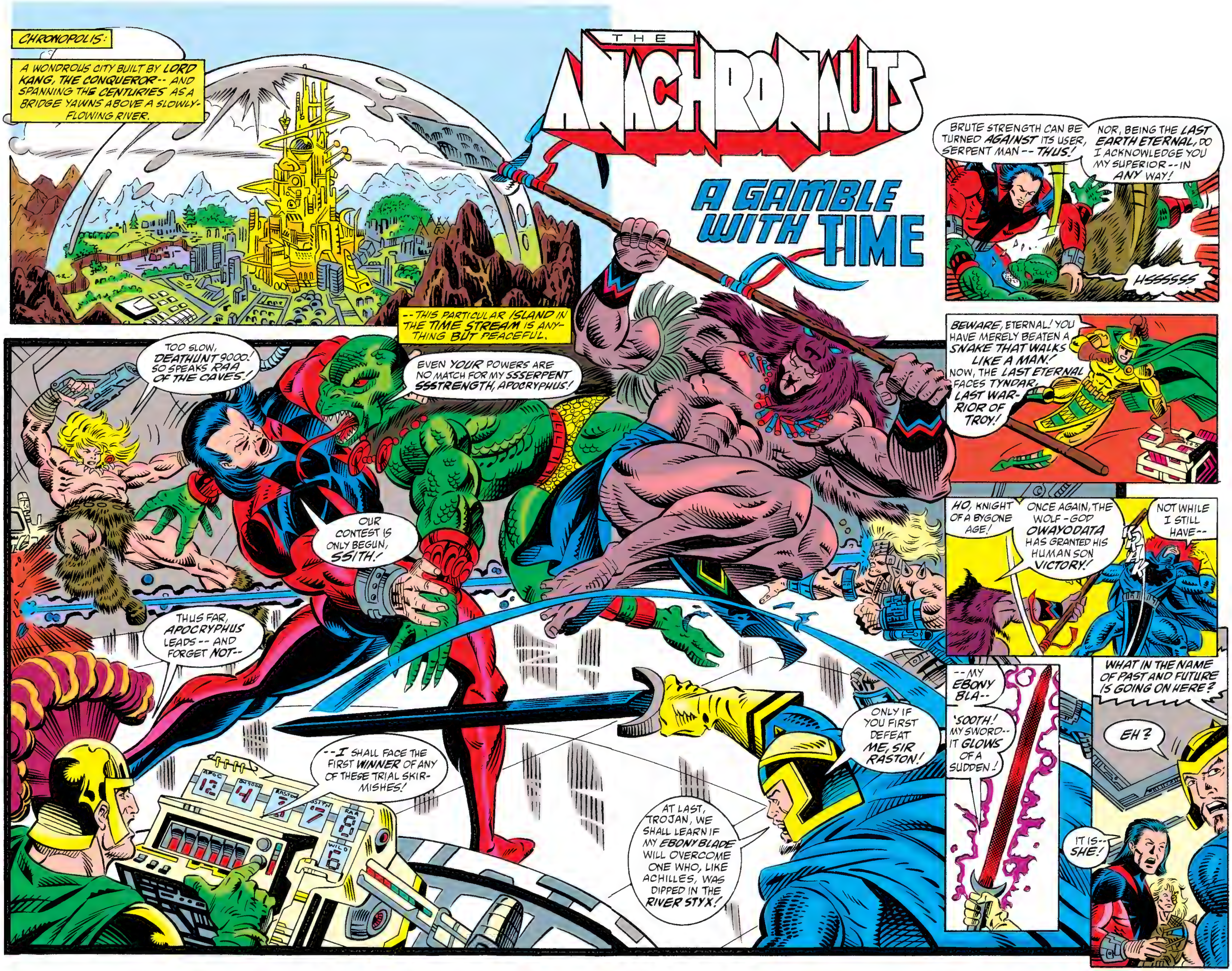

YOU HAVE... FREE PASSAGE. GO.
CLEARLY, SIR KNIGHT, YE **FEAR** THE EBONY BLADE -- WHILE I **EMBRACE** IT!
YE SOUGHT TO **DISARM** ME. I SOUGHT YOUR **BLOOD**.
VERY WELL. I CONCEDE.
BUT WE SHALL MEET AGAIN WHEN I HAVE GROWN STRONGER WITH THE SOULS OF THE GUILTY--
--AND YE ARE PERHAPS LESS CONCERNED WITH THE PRESERVATION OF LIFE.
I--I WILL FOLLOW YOU TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH!
HOW?
VALINOR LEAPS SKYWARD, BEARING HIS MYSTERIOUS NEW RIDER...
--LEAVING THE **AVENGERS** WITH A SENSE OF FOREBODING--
--AND THE **BLACK KNIGHT** WITH HIS SHAME.
END

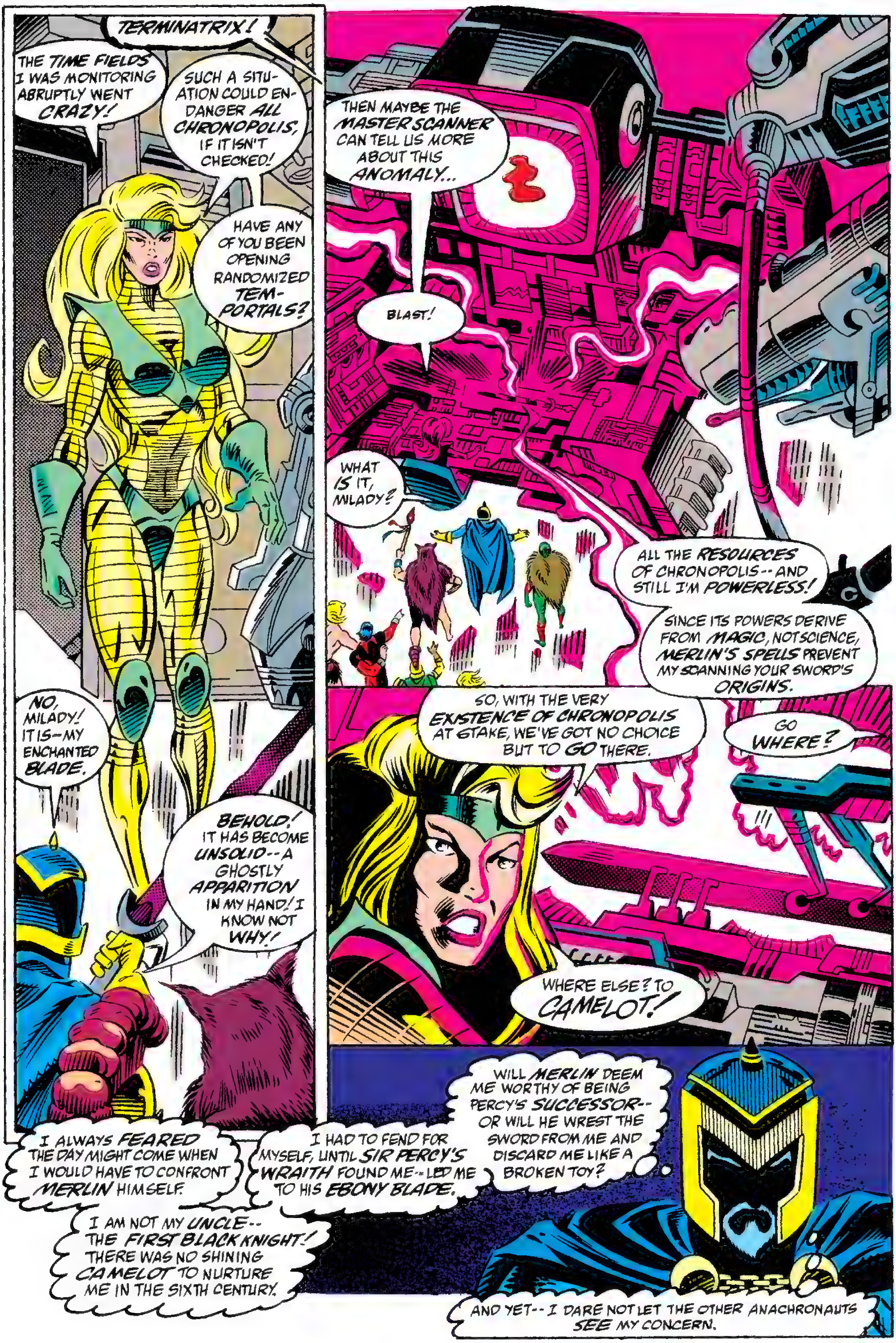

IF YOU HAVEN'T BEEN FOLLOWING THE RECENT EVENTS IN OUR MONTHLY AVENGERS TITLE, THEN YOU'VE MISSED CRYSTAL'S ENCOUNTER WITH THE VISION'S EVIL TWIN! CHECK OUT ISSUE #362 FOR DETAILS, 'CAUSE THIS IS ONE EVIL ANDROID WHO WANTS OUR RESIDENT INHUMAN--AND WILL STOP AT NOTHING TO GET HER!!! --RALF & PAT
·AVON 93·

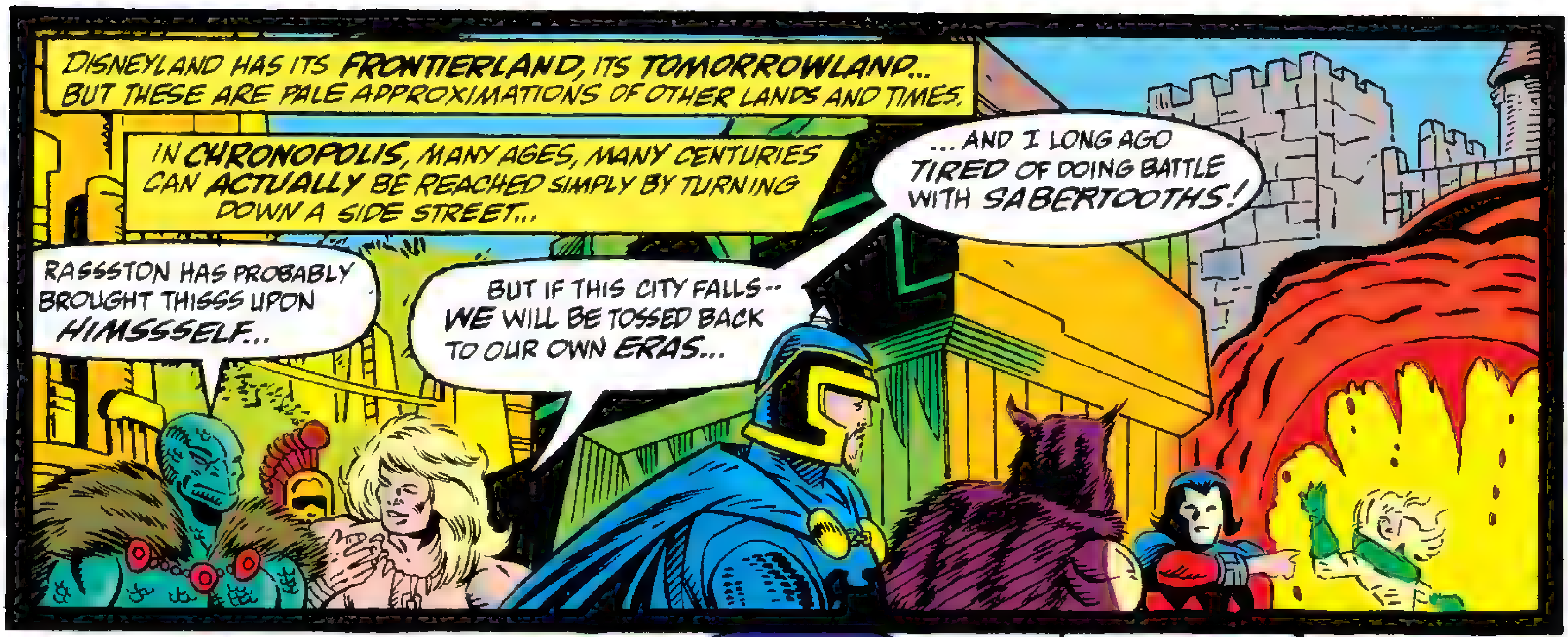
WE THOUGHT WE WOULD SPOTLIGHT MAGDALENE OF THE GATHERERS IN THIS PIN-UP. CALL IT FORESHADOWING, OR CALL IT A "RED HERRING." WHATEVER OUR MOTIVE, WE SUGGEST YOU KEEP YOUR EYES ON THIS CHARACTER--SHE'LL BE SHAKING THINGS UP IN FUTURE ISSUES OF THE AVENGERS! **--RALF & PAT**

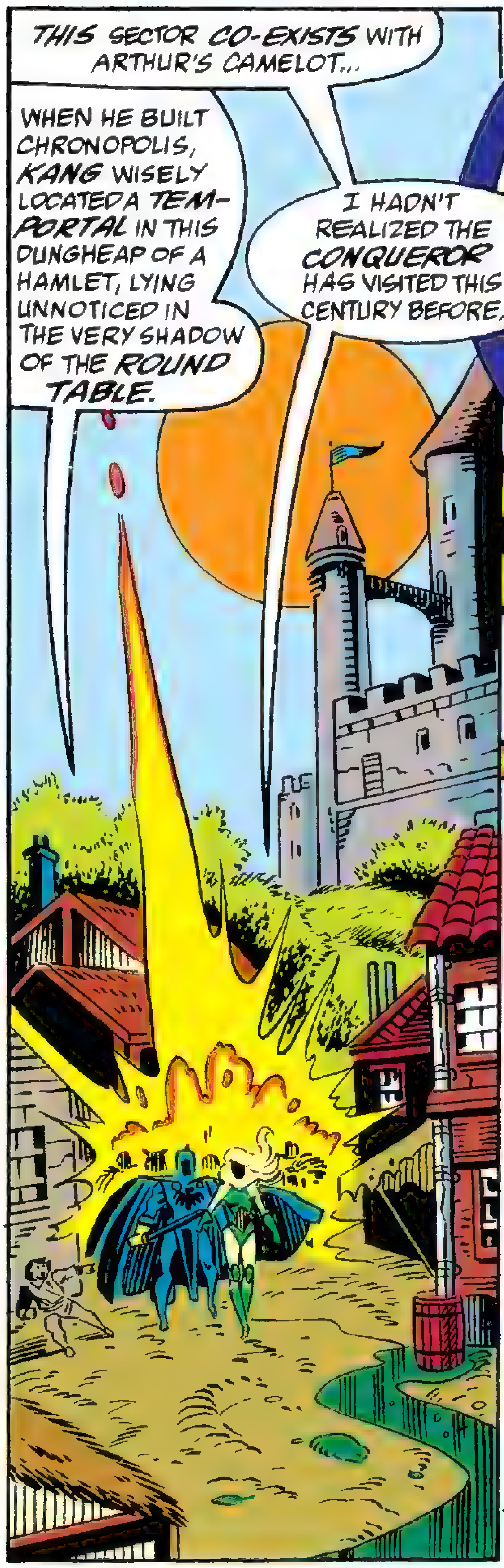

THE ANACHRONAUTS
DAN PANOSIAN 1993

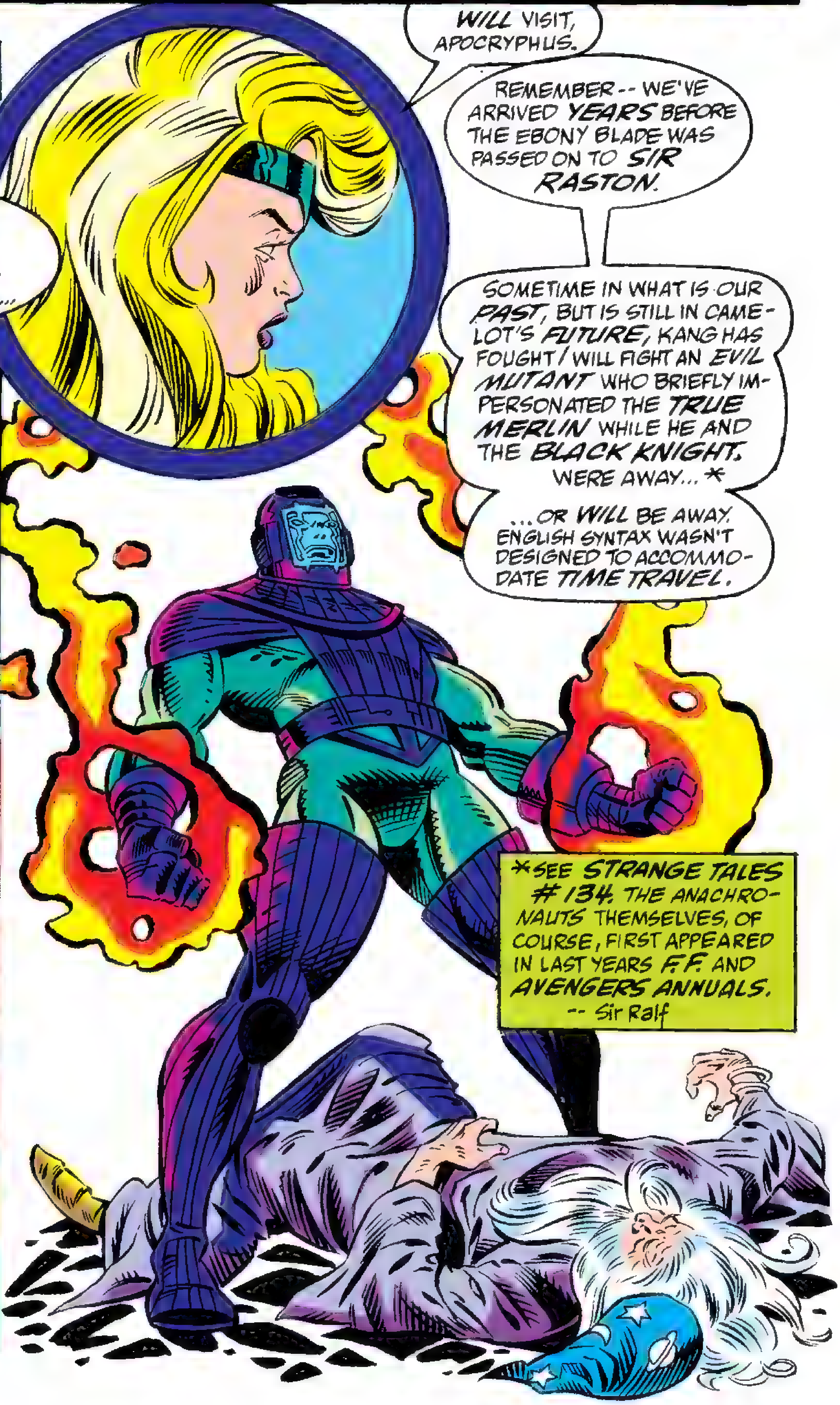
Ye Old Prologue:
IN AN AGE LONG PAST, THE FABLED CITY OF CAMELOT, SEAT OF KING ARTHUR'S POWER, DID GAZE HEAVENWARD--
--TO BEHOLD A MYSTIC STARSTONE, DARKER THAN EBONY, FALLING FROM OUT OF THE VERY SKY.
'TWAS SOUGHT AND FOUND BY THE GREAT MAGE, MERLIN, WHO HAD DIVINED ITS COMING WITH HIS SORCERY.
FROM IT, HE DID FASHION TWO WEAPONS NON-PAREIL--
--A SWORD FOR GOOD--
-- AND A DAGGER FOR EVIL.
THE SWORD HE GAVE TO HIS CHAMPION, SIR PERCY OF SCANDIA... HE WHO CAME TO BE CALLED...
...THE BLACK KNIGHT!
THE DAGGER FELL INTO THE HANDS OF THE SCHEMING MORDRED, SON AND FOE OF ARTHUR...
... WHO, WITH IT, SLEW SIR PERCY DURING THE FALL OF CAMELOT.
AND THUS DID THE CURTAIN OF DOOM FALL, VERILY, UPON AN AGE... AN ERA... A WORLD.


CHRONOPOLIS:
A WONDROUS CITY BUILT BY LORD KANG, THE CONQUEROR -- AND SPANNING THE CENTURIES AS A BRIDGE YAWNS ABOVE A SLOWLY-FLOWING RIVER.
THE ANACHRONAUTS
A GAMBLE WITH TIME
--THIS PARTICULAR ISLAND IN THE TIME STREAM IS ANYTHING BUT PEACEFUL.
TOO SLOW, DEATHUNT 9000! SO SPEAKS RAA OF THE CAVES!
EVEN YOUR POWERS ARE NO MATCH FOR MY SSSERPENT SSSTRENGTH, APOCRYPHUS!
OUR CONTEST IS ONLY BEGUN, SSITH!
THUS FAR, APOCRYPHUS LEADS -- AND FORGET NOT--
--I SHALL FACE THE FIRST WINNER OF ANY OF THESE TRIAL SKIRMISHES!
APOC 12
DH 9000 4
RASTON 7
SSITH 7
RAA 8
WILD 6
ONLY IF YOU FIRST DEFEAT ME, SIR RASTON!
AT LAST, TROJAN, WE SHALL LEARN IF MY EBONY BLADE WILL OVERCOME ONE WHO, LIKE ACHILLES, WAS DIPPED IN THE RIVER STYX!
BRUTE STRENGTH CAN BE TURNED AGAINST ITS USER, SERPENT MAN -- THUS!
NOR, BEING THE LAST EARTH ETERNAL, DO I ACKNOWLEDGE YOU MY SUPERIOR -- IN ANY WAY!
HSSSSSS
BEWARE, ETERNAL! YOU HAVE MERELY BEATEN A SNAKE THAT WALKS LIKE A MAN! NOW, THE LAST ETERNAL FACES TYNDAR, LAST WARRIOR OF TROY!
HO, KNIGHT OF A BYGONE AGE!
ONCE AGAIN, THE WOLF-GOD OWAYODATA HAS GRANTED HIS HUMAN SON VICTORY!
KRAK
NOT WHILE I STILL HAVE--
--MY EBONY BLA--
'SOOTH! MY SWORD-- IT GLOWS OF A SUDDEN!
WHAT IN THE NAME OF PAST AND FUTURE IS GOING ON HERE?
EH?
IT IS-- SHE!

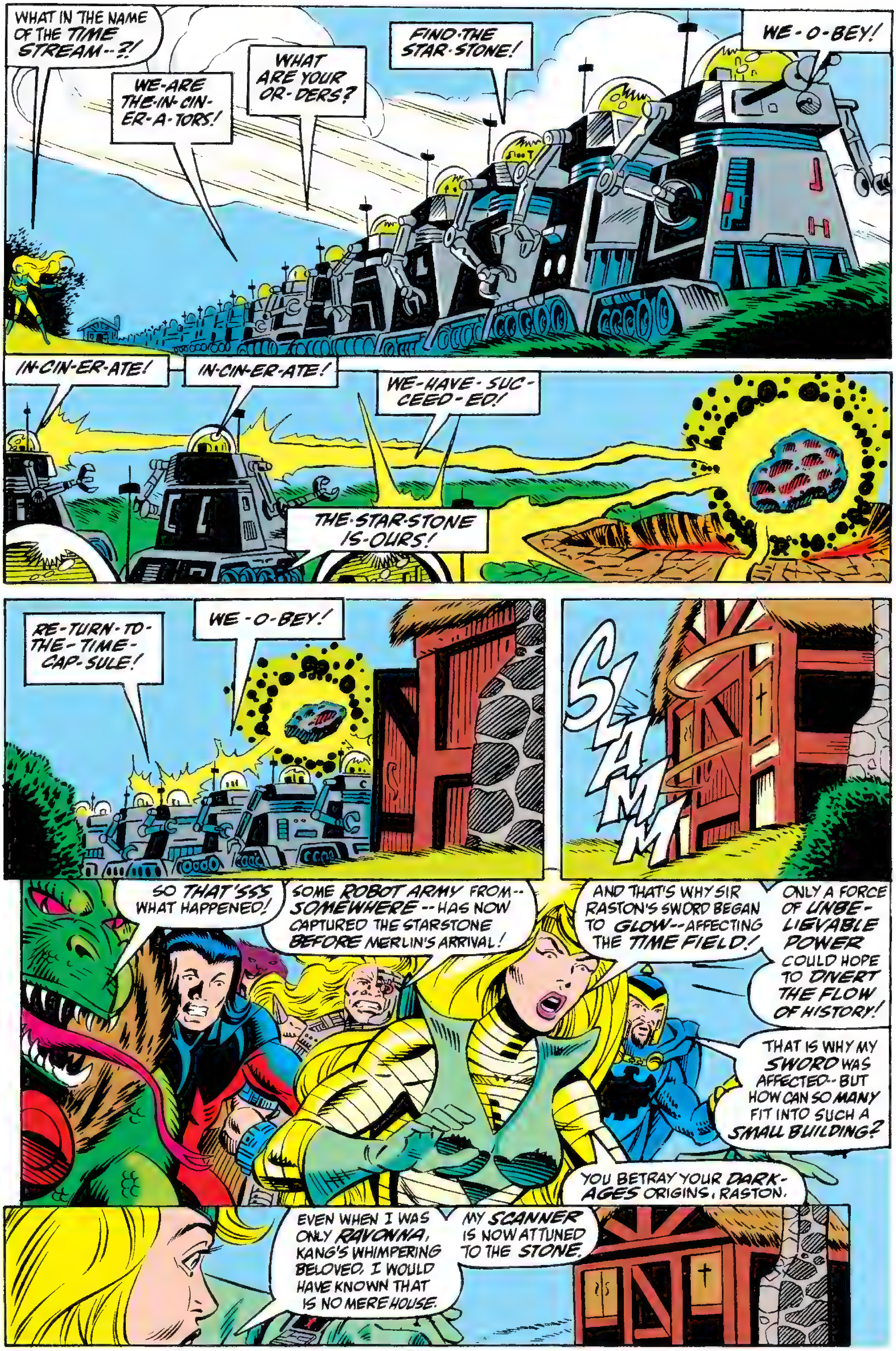

TERMINATRIX!
THE TIME FIELDS I WAS MONITORING ABRUPTLY WENT CRAZY!
SUCH A SITUATION COULD ENDANGER ALL CHRONOPOLIS, IF IT ISN'T CHECKED!
HAVE ANY OF YOU BEEN OPENING RANDOMIZED TEMPORTALS?
NO, MILADY! IT IS--MY ENCHANTED BLADE.
BEHOLD! IT HAS BECOME UNSOLID--A GHOSTLY APPARITION IN MY HAND! I KNOW NOT WHY!
THEN MAYBE THE MASTER SCANNER CAN TELL US MORE ABOUT THIS ANOMALY...
BLAST!
WHAT IS IT, MILADY?
ALL THE RESOURCES OF CHRONOPOLIS--AND STILL I'M POWERLESS!
SINCE ITS POWERS DERIVE FROM MAGIC, NOT SCIENCE, MERLIN'S SPELLS PREVENT MY SCANNING YOUR SWORD'S ORIGINS.
SO, WITH THE VERY EXISTENCE OF CHRONOPOLIS AT STAKE, WE'VE GOT NO CHOICE BUT TO GO THERE.
GO WHERE?
WHERE ELSE? TO CAMELOT!
I ALWAYS FEARED THE DAY MIGHT COME WHEN I WOULD HAVE TO CONFRONT MERLIN HIMSELF.
I AM NOT MY UNCLE--THE FIRST BLACK KNIGHT! THERE WAS NO SHINING CAMELOT TO NURTURE ME IN THE SIXTH CENTURY.
I HAD TO FEND FOR MYSELF, UNTIL SIR PERCY'S WRAITH FOUND ME--LED ME TO HIS EBONY BLADE.
WILL MERLIN DEEM ME WORTHY OF BEING PERCY'S SUCCESSOR--OR WILL HE WREST THE SWORD FROM ME AND DISCARD ME LIKE A BROKEN TOY?
AND YET--I DARE NOT LET THE OTHER ANACHRONAUTS SEE MY CONCERN.

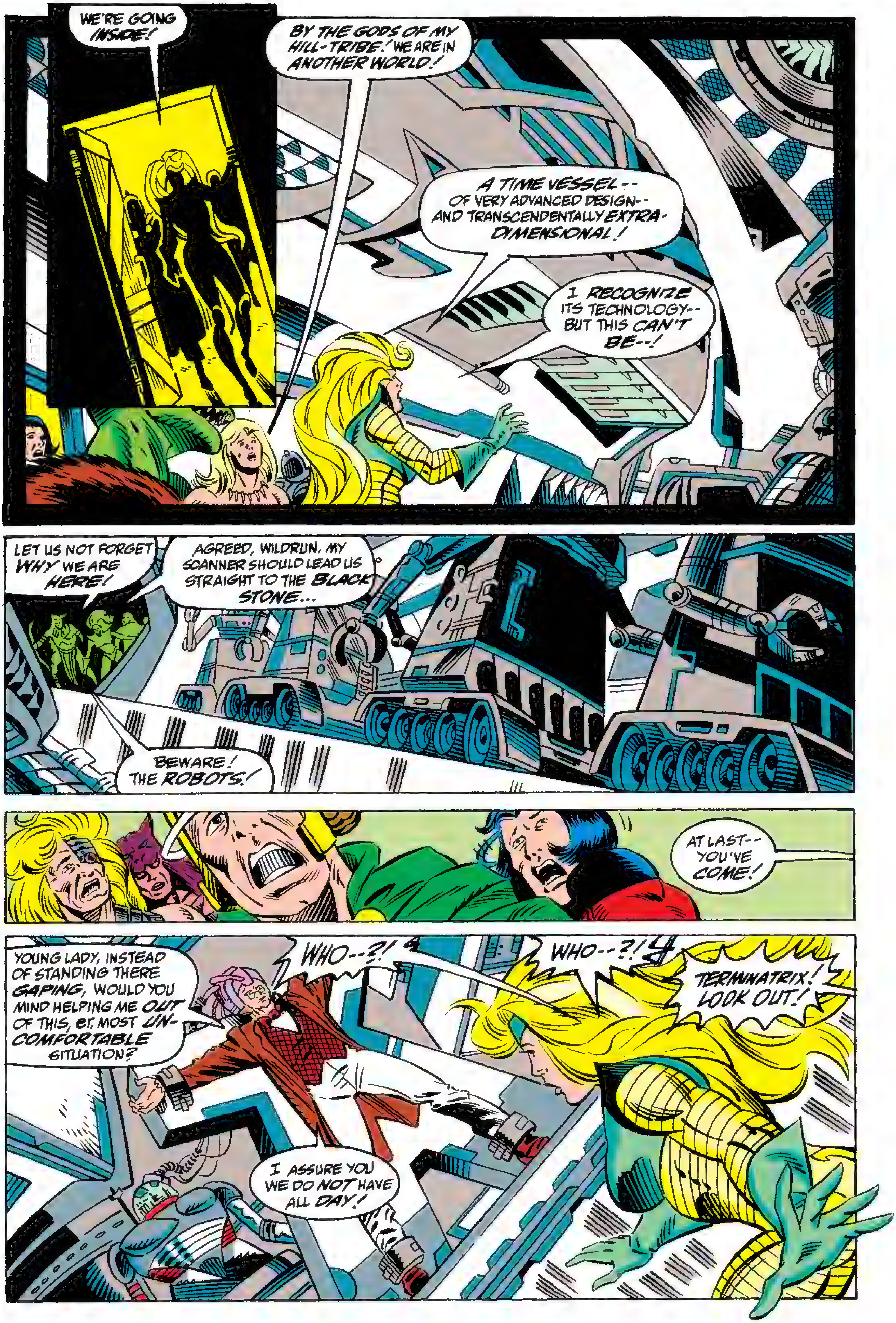

DISNEYLAND HAS ITS FRONTIERLAND, ITS TOMORROWLAND... BUT THESE ARE PALE APPROXIMATIONS OF OTHER LANDS AND TIMES.
IN CHRONOPOLIS, MANY AGES, MANY CENTURIES CAN ACTUALLY BE REACHED SIMPLY BY TURNING DOWN A SIDE STREET...
RASSSTON HAS PROBABLY BROUGHT THISSS UPON HIMSSSELF...
BUT IF THIS CITY FALLS-- WE WILL BE TOSSED BACK TO OUR OWN ERAS...
...AND I LONG AGO TIRED OF DOING BATTLE WITH SABERTOOTHS!

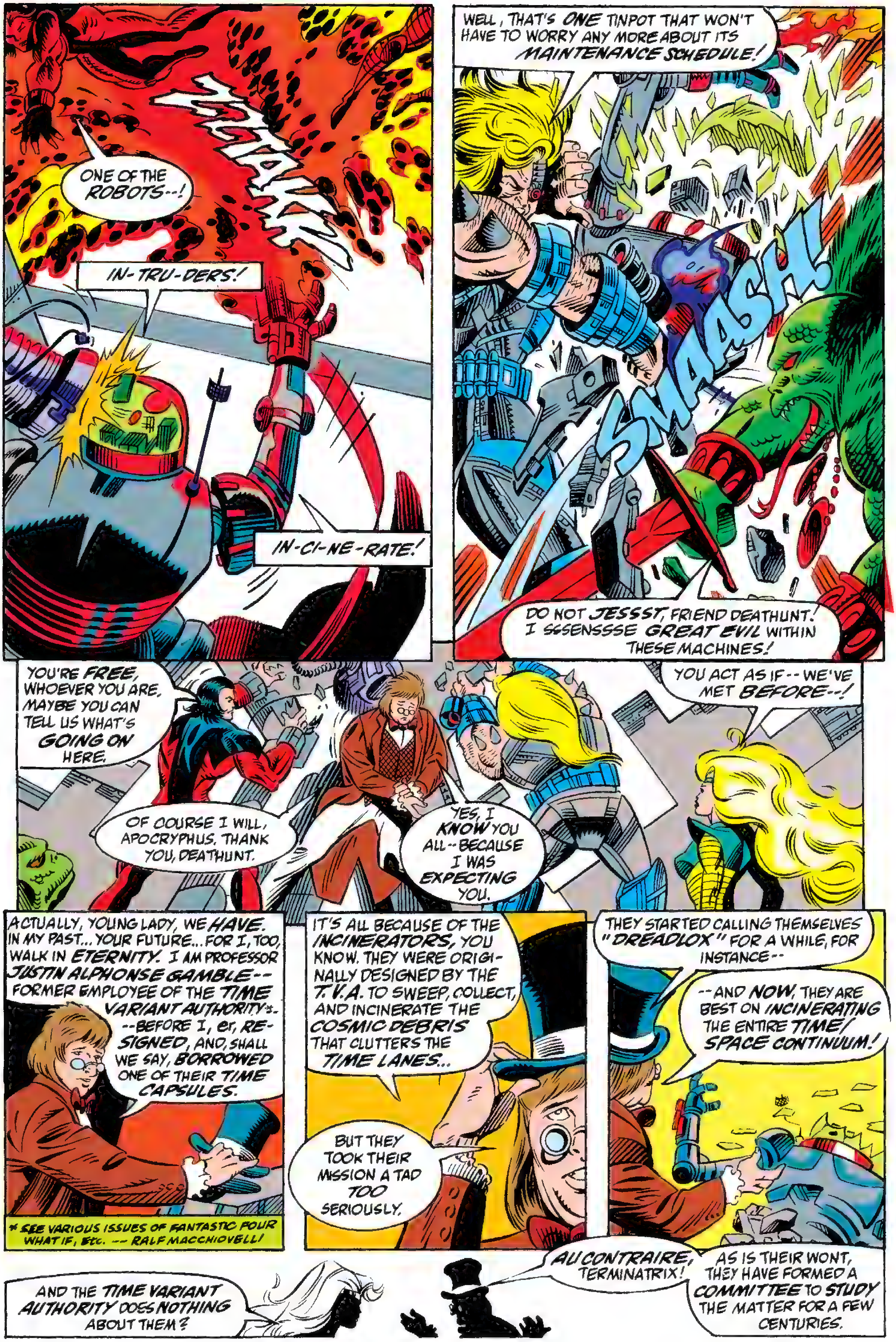

THIS SECTOR CO-EXISTS WITH ARTHUR'S CAMELOT...
WHEN HE BUILT CHRONOPOLIS, KANG WISELY LOCATED A TEMPORTAL IN THIS DUNGHEAP OF A HAMLET, LYING UNNOTICED IN THE VERY SHADOW OF THE ROUND TABLE.
I HADN'T REALIZED THE CONQUEROR HAS VISITED THIS CENTURY BEFORE...

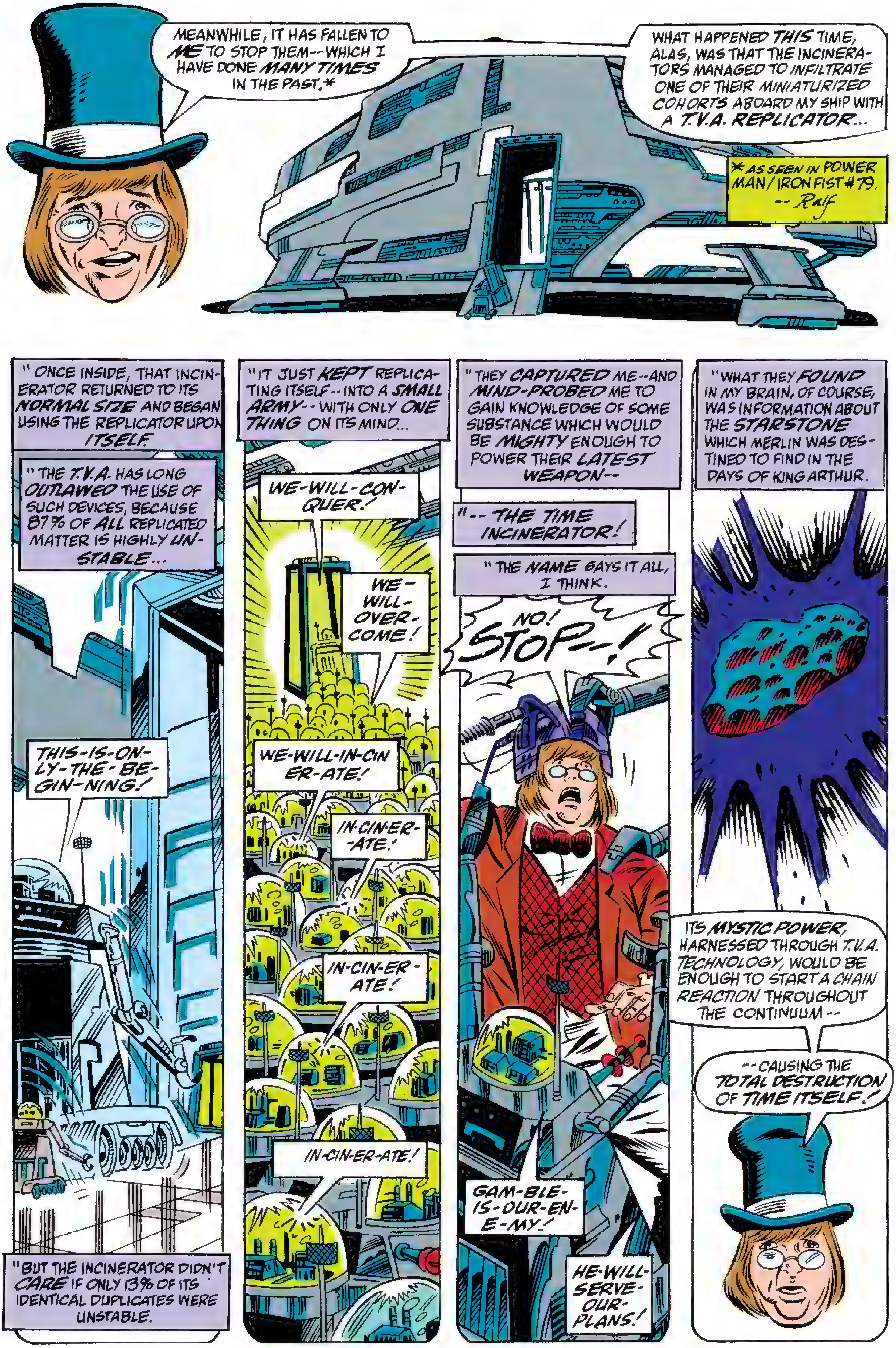

WILL VISIT, APOCRYPHUS.
REMEMBER-- WE'VE ARRIVED YEARS BEFORE THE EBONY BLADE WAS PASSED ON TO SIR RASTON.
SOMETIME IN WHAT IS OUR PAST, BUT IS STILL IN CAMELOT'S FUTURE, KANG HAS FOUGHT / WILL FIGHT AN EVIL MUTANT WHO BRIEFLY IMPERSONATED THE TRUE MERLIN WHILE HE AND THE BLACK KNIGHT WERE AWAY...*
...OR WILL BE AWAY. ENGLISH SYNTAX WASN'T DESIGNED TO ACCOMMODATE TIME TRAVEL.
*SEE STRANGE TALES #134. THE ANACHRONAUTS THEMSELVES, OF COURSE, FIRST APPEARED IN LAST YEARS F.F. AND AVENGERS ANNUALS. -- Sir Ralf

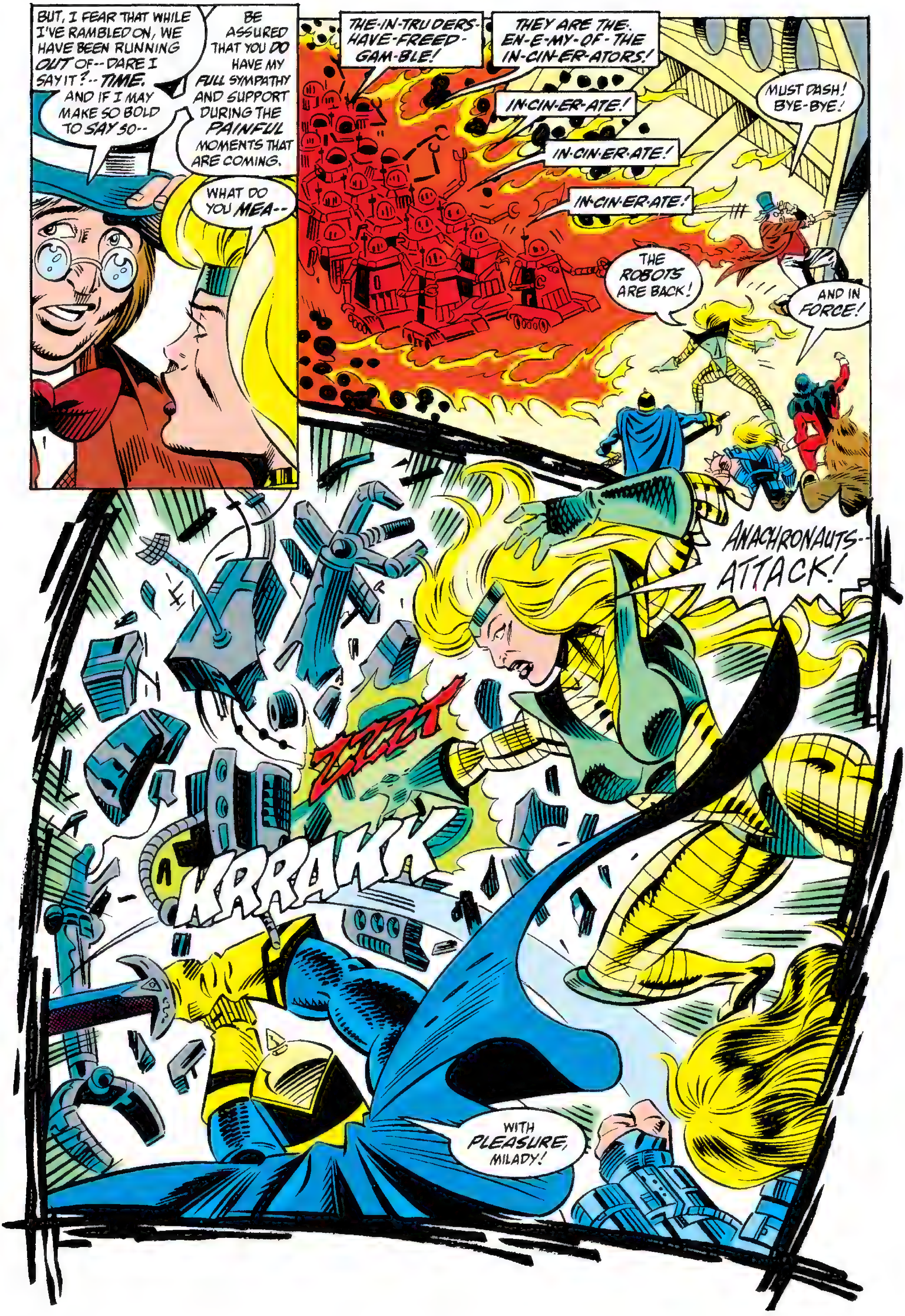
I DID LEARN JUST ENOUGH FROM THE MASTER SCANNER TO KNOW THAT THIS IS WHERE THE EBONY STARSTONE IS DESTINED TO STRIKE THE EARTH.
WE'RE A BIT EARLY...
SHOULDN'T MERLIN BE HERE?
HE WILL BE--IN DUE TIME. HE--
WAIT!
THERE'S THE STARSTONE--RIGHT ON SCHEDULE!
KROOOOM
AND NOW WE WAIT, TO DETERMINE EXACTLY WHEN THE ANOMALY WILL--
WHAT-?!
HAVE WE WANDERED INTO A DREAM?
BOTH SSSPACE AND TIME SSSEEM TO BE TWISSSTING BEFORE OUR VERY EYES!!
THERE LIES THE SOURCE OF THE ANOMALY THAT THREATENS CHRONOPOLIS!
THAT COTTAGE-- THAT APPEARED FROM NOWHERE!
MY REMOTE SCAN INDICATES THAT A TIME FIELD OF 4.6 NOW SURROUNDS OUR IMMEDIATE VICINITY...
ANACHRONAUTS-- WE'RE TRAPPED!
I'D SUSPECT KANG HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH IT-- BUT HE STILL LIES IN SUSPENDED ANIMATION BACK IN THE CITY!
WE SHALL LEARN THE TRUTH SOON ENOUGH MILADY--
--FOR THE COTTAGE DOOR IS OPENING!

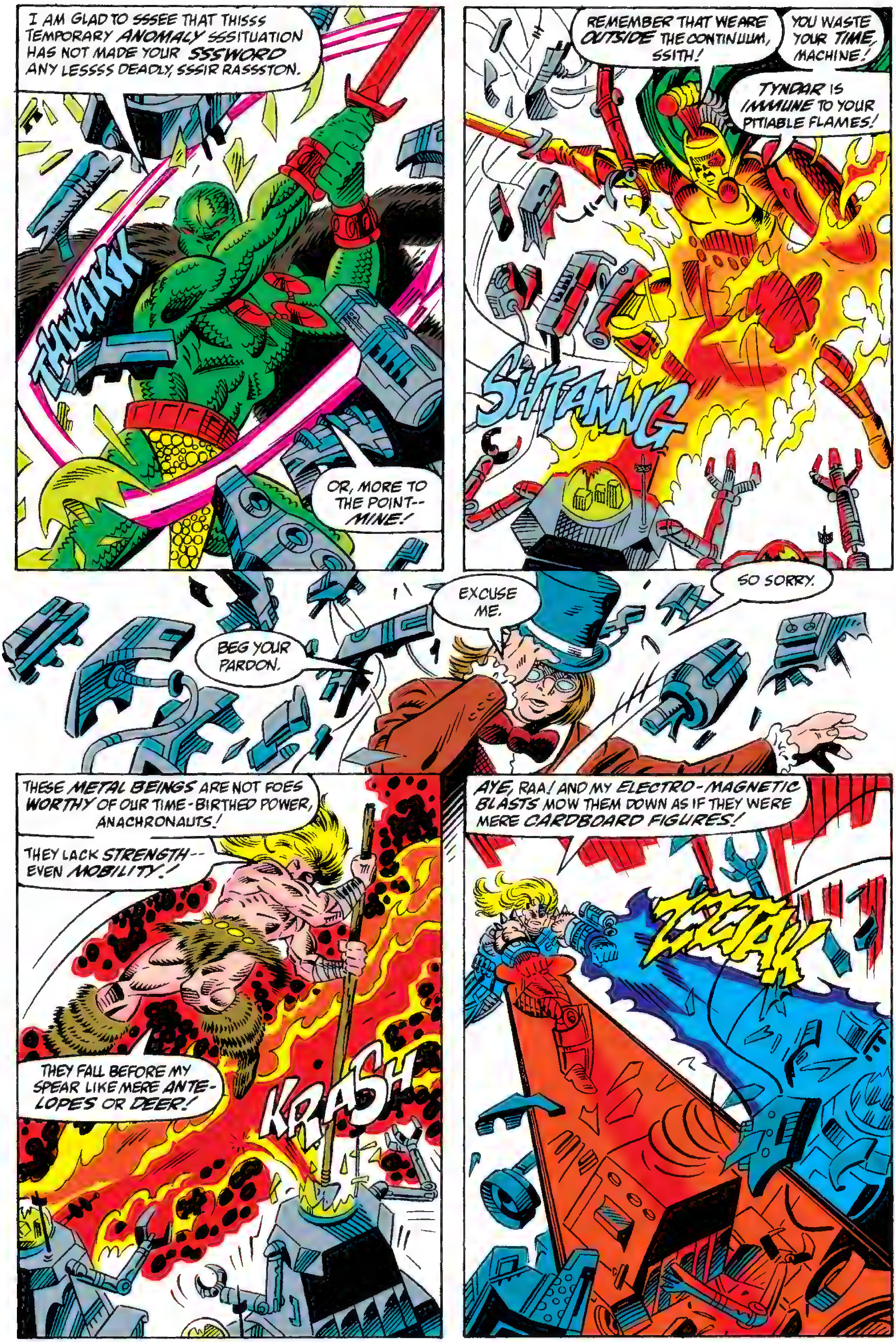

WHAT IN THE NAME OF THE TIME STREAM--?!
WE-ARE THE-IN-CIN-ER-A-TORS!
WHAT ARE YOUR OR-DERS?
FIND-THE STAR-STONE!
WE-O-BEY!
IN-CIN-ER-ATE!
IN-CIN-ER-ATE!
WE-HAVE-SUC-CEED-ED!
THE-STAR-STONE IS-OURS!
RE-TURN-TO-THE-TIME-CAP-SULE!
WE-O-BEY!
SLAMM
SO THAT'SSS WHAT HAPPENED!
SOME ROBOT ARMY FROM--SOMEWHERE--HAS NOW CAPTURED THE STARSTONE BEFORE MERLIN'S ARRIVAL!
AND THAT'S WHY SIR RASTON'S SWORD BEGAN TO GLOW--AFFECTING THE TIME FIELD!
ONLY A FORCE OF UNBELIEVABLE POWER COULD HOPE TO DIVERT THE FLOW OF HISTORY!
THAT IS WHY MY SWORD WAS AFFECTED--BUT HOW CAN SO MANY FIT INTO SUCH A SMALL BUILDING?
YOU BETRAY YOUR DARK-AGES ORIGINS, RASTON.
EVEN WHEN I WAS ONLY RAVONNA, KANG'S WHIMPERING BELOVED, I WOULD HAVE KNOWN THAT IS NO MERE HOUSE.
MY SCANNER IS NOW ATTUNED TO THE STONE.

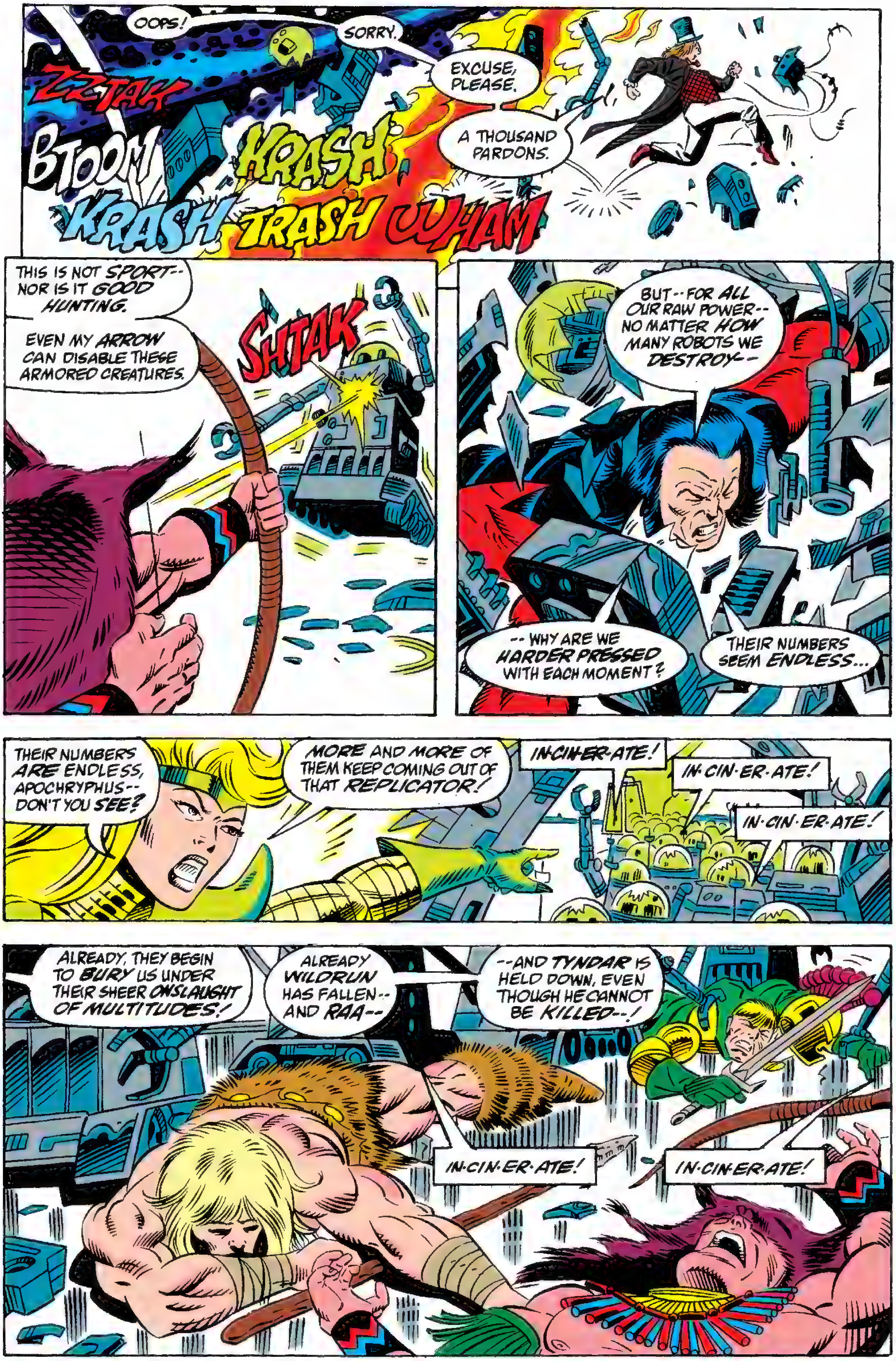

WE'RE GOING INSIDE!
BY THE GODS OF MY HILL-TRIBE! WE ARE IN ANOTHER WORLD!
A TIME VESSEL-- OF VERY ADVANCED DESIGN-- AND TRANSCENDENTALLY EXTRA-DIMENSIONAL!
I RECOGNIZE ITS TECHNOLOGY-- BUT THIS CAN'T BE--!
LET US NOT FORGET WHY WE ARE HERE!
AGREED, WILDRUN. MY SCANNER SHOULD LEAD US STRAIGHT TO THE BLACK STONE...
BEWARE! THE ROBOTS!
AT LAST-- YOU'VE COME!
YOUNG LADY, INSTEAD OF STANDING THERE GAPING, WOULD YOU MIND HELPING ME OUT OF THIS, er, MOST UNCOMFORTABLE SITUATION?
WHO--?!
WHO--?!
TERMINATRIX! LOOK OUT!
I ASSURE YOU WE DO NOT HAVE ALL DAY!

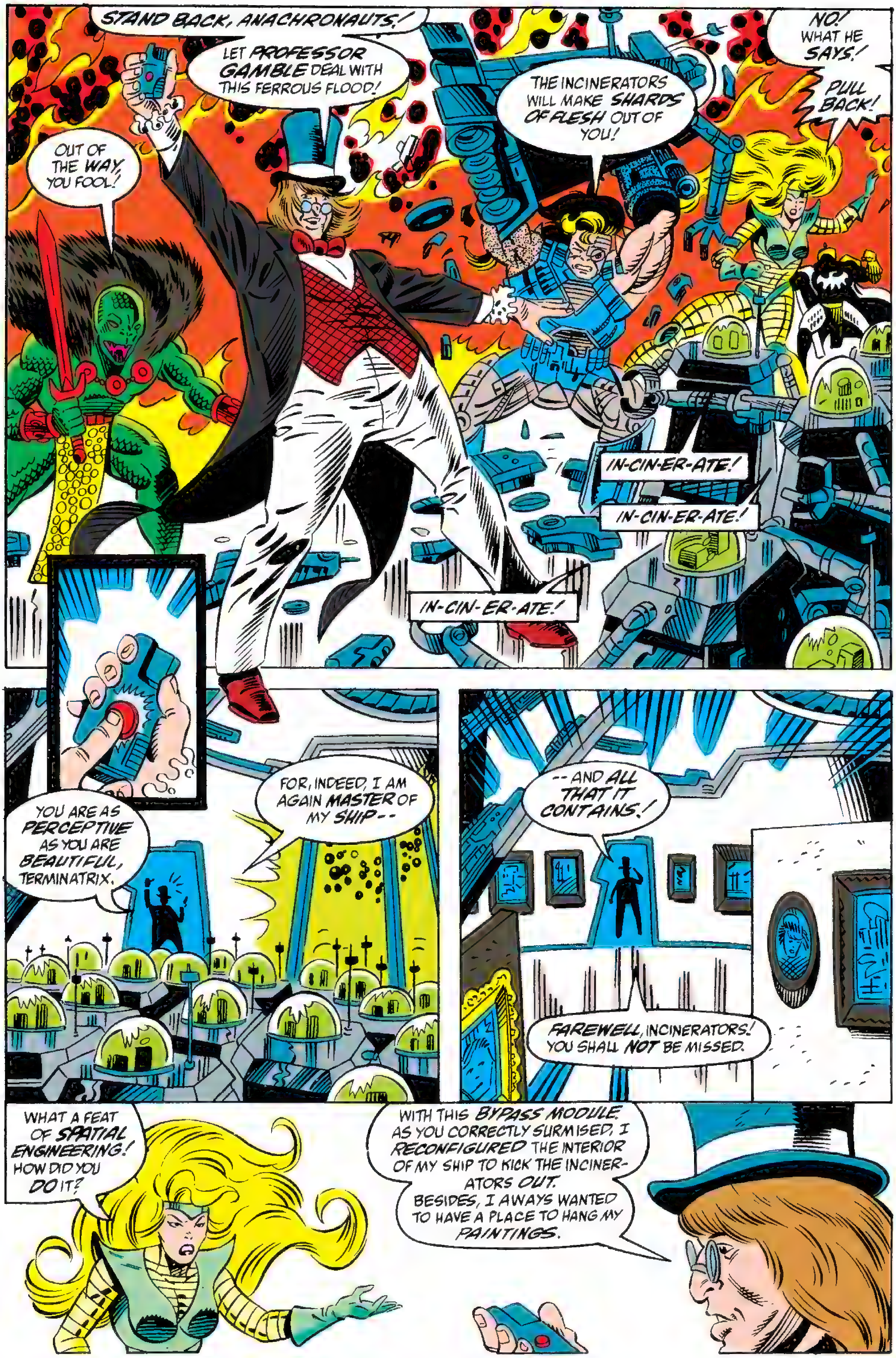

ONE OF THE ROBOTS--!
IN-TRU-DERS!
IN-CI-NE-RATE!
WELL, THAT'S ONE TINPOT THAT WON'T HAVE TO WORRY ANY MORE ABOUT ITS MAINTENANCE SCHEDULE!
SMASH!
DO NOT JESSST, FRIEND DEATHUNT. I SSSENSSSE GREAT EVIL WITHIN THESE MACHINES!
YOU'RE FREE, WHOEVER YOU ARE. MAYBE YOU CAN TELL US WHAT'S GOING ON HERE.
OF COURSE I WILL, APOCRYPHUS. THANK YOU, DEATHUNT.
YES, I KNOW YOU ALL--BECAUSE I WAS EXPECTING YOU.
YOU ACT AS IF--WE'VE MET BEFORE--!
ACTUALLY, YOUNG LADY, WE HAVE. IN MY PAST... YOUR FUTURE... FOR I, TOO, WALK IN ETERNITY. I AM PROFESSOR JUSTIN ALPHONSE GAMBLE--FORMER EMPLOYEE OF THE TIME VARIANT AUTHORITY*--BEFORE I, er, RESIGNED, AND, SHALL WE SAY, BORROWED ONE OF THEIR TIME CAPSULES.
* SEE VARIOUS ISSUES OF FANTASTIC FOUR, WHAT IF, ETC. -- RALF MACCHIOVELLI!
IT'S ALL BECAUSE OF THE INCINERATORS, YOU KNOW. THEY WERE ORIGINALLY DESIGNED BY THE T.V.A. TO SWEEP, COLLECT, AND INCINERATE THE COSMIC DEBRIS THAT CLUTTERS THE TIME LANES...
BUT THEY TOOK THEIR MISSION A TAD TOO SERIOUSLY.
THEY STARTED CALLING THEMSELVES "DREADLOX" FOR A WHILE, FOR INSTANCE--
--AND NOW, THEY ARE BENT ON INCINERATING THE ENTIRE TIME/SPACE CONTINUUM!
AND THE TIME VARIANT AUTHORITY DOES NOTHING ABOUT THEM?
AU CONTRAIRE, TERMINATRIX!
AS IS THEIR WONT, THEY HAVE FORMED A COMMITTEE TO STUDY THE MATTER FOR A FEW CENTURIES.

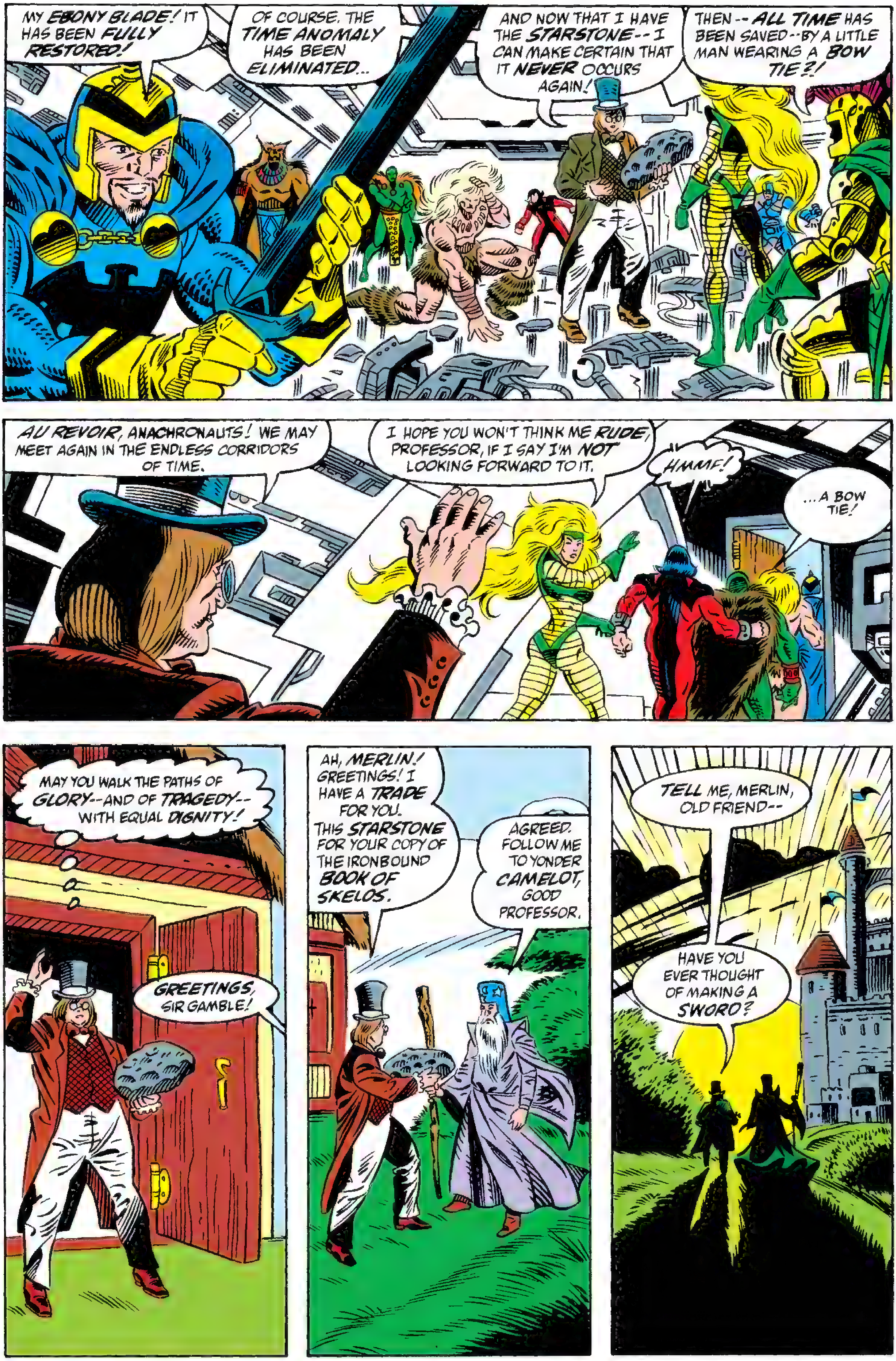

MEANWHILE, IT HAS FALLEN TO *ME* TO STOP THEM--WHICH I HAVE DONE *MANY TIMES* IN THE PAST.*
WHAT HAPPENED *THIS* TIME, ALAS, WAS THAT THE INCINERATORS MANAGED TO INFILTRATE ONE OF THEIR MINIATURIZED COHORTS ABOARD MY SHIP WITH A *T.V.A. REPLICATOR*...
*AS SEEN IN POWER MAN/IRON FIST #79. -- Ralf
"ONCE INSIDE, THAT INCINERATOR RETURNED TO ITS *NORMAL SIZE* AND BEGAN USING THE REPLICATOR UPON *ITSELF*.
"THE *T.V.A.* HAS LONG *OUTLAWED* THE USE OF SUCH DEVICES, BECAUSE 87% OF *ALL* REPLICATED MATTER IS HIGHLY *UNSTABLE*...
THIS-IS-ON-LY-THE-BE-GIN-NING!
"BUT THE INCINERATOR DIDN'T *CARE* IF ONLY 13% OF ITS IDENTICAL DUPLICATES WERE UNSTABLE.
"IT JUST *KEPT* REPLICATING ITSELF--INTO A *SMALL ARMY*--WITH ONLY *ONE THING* ON ITS MIND...
WE-WILL-CON-QUER!
WE-WILL-OVER-COME!
WE-WILL-IN-CIN-ER-ATE!
IN-CIN-ER-ATE!
IN-CIN-ER-ATE!
IN-CIN-ER-ATE!
"THEY *CAPTURED* ME--AND *MIND-PROBED* ME TO GAIN KNOWLEDGE OF SOME SUBSTANCE WHICH WOULD BE *MIGHTY* ENOUGH TO POWER THEIR *LATEST WEAPON*--
"--*THE TIME INCINERATOR!*
"THE *NAME* SAYS IT ALL, I THINK.
NO! STOP--!
GAM-BLE-IS-OUR-EN-E-MY!
HE-WILL-SERVE-OUR-PLANS!
"WHAT THEY *FOUND* IN MY BRAIN, OF COURSE, WAS INFORMATION ABOUT THE *STARSTONE* WHICH MERLIN WAS DESTINED TO FIND IN THE DAYS OF KING ARTHUR.
ITS *MYSTIC POWER*, HARNESSED THROUGH *T.V.A. TECHNOLOGY*, WOULD BE ENOUGH TO START A *CHAIN REACTION* THROUGHOUT THE CONTINUUM--
--CAUSING THE *TOTAL DESTRUCTION OF TIME ITSELF!*


BUT, I FEAR THAT WHILE I'VE RAMBLED ON, WE HAVE BEEN RUNNING *OUT* OF-- DARE I SAY IT?-- *TIME.*
AND IF I MAY MAKE SO BOLD TO *SAY* SO--
BE ASSURED THAT YOU *DO* HAVE MY *FULL* SYMPATHY AND SUPPORT DURING THE *PAINFUL* MOMENTS THAT ARE COMING.
WHAT DO YOU *MEA*--
THE-IN-TRU-DERS-HAVE-FREED-GAM-BLE!
THEY ARE THE-EN-E-MY-OF-THE-IN-CIN-ER-ATORS!
IN-CIN-ER-ATE!
IN·CIN·ER·ATE!
IN·CIN·ER·ATE!
MUST DASH! BYE-BYE!
THE *ROBOTS* ARE BACK!
AND IN *FORCE!*
ANACHRONAUTS-- ATTACK!
ZZZT
KRRAKK
WITH *PLEASURE,* MILADY!


I AM GLAD TO SSSEE THAT THISSS TEMPORARY *ANOMALY* SSSITUATION HAS NOT MADE YOUR *SSSWORD* ANY LESSSS DEADLY, SSSIR RASSSTON.
THWAKK
OR, MORE TO THE POINT-- *MINE!*
REMEMBER THAT WE ARE *OUTSIDE* THE CONTINUUM, SSITH!
YOU WASTE YOUR *TIME*, MACHINE!
TYNDAR IS *IMMUNE* TO YOUR PITIABLE FLAMES!
SHTANNG
EXCUSE ME.
SO SORRY.
BEG YOUR PARDON.
THESE *METAL BEINGS* ARE NOT FOES *WORTHY* OF OUR TIME-BIRTHED POWER, ANACHRONAUTS!
THEY LACK *STRENGTH*-- EVEN *MOBILITY!*
THEY FALL BEFORE MY SPEAR LIKE MERE *ANTELOPES* OR *DEER!*
KRASH
AYE, RAA! AND MY *ELECTRO-MAGNETIC BLASTS* MOW THEM DOWN AS IF THEY WERE MERE *CARDBOARD FIGURES!*
ZZZAK


OOPS!
SORRY.
EXCUSE, PLEASE.
A THOUSAND PARDONS.
ZZTAK
BTOOM
KRASH
KRASH
TRASH
WHAM
THIS IS NOT SPORT--NOR IS IT GOOD HUNTING.
EVEN MY ARROW CAN DISABLE THESE ARMORED CREATURES.
SHTAK
BUT--FOR ALL OUR RAW POWER--NO MATTER HOW MANY ROBOTS WE DESTROY--
--WHY ARE WE HARDER PRESSED WITH EACH MOMENT?
THEIR NUMBERS SEEM ENDLESS...
THEIR NUMBERS ARE ENDLESS, APOCHRYPHUS--DON'T YOU SEE?
MORE AND MORE OF THEM KEEP COMING OUT OF THAT REPLICATOR!
IN-CIN-ER-ATE!
IN-CIN-ER-ATE!
IN-CIN-ER-ATE!
ALREADY, THEY BEGIN TO BURY US UNDER THEIR SHEER ONSLAUGHT OF MULTITUDES!
ALREADY WILDRUN HAS FALLEN--AND RAA--
--AND TYNDAR IS HELD DOWN, EVEN THOUGH HE CANNOT BE KILLED--!
IN-CIN-ER-ATE!
IN-CIN-ER-ATE!


STAND BACK, ANACHRONAUTS!
LET PROFESSOR GAMBLE DEAL WITH THIS FERROUS FLOOD!
OUT OF THE WAY, YOU FOOL!
THE INCINERATORS WILL MAKE SHARDS OF FLESH OUT OF YOU!
NO! WHAT HE SAYS!
PULL BACK!
IN-CIN-ER-ATE!
IN-CIN-ER-ATE!
IN-CIN-ER-ATE!
YOU ARE AS PERCEPTIVE AS YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL, TERMINATRIX.
FOR, INDEED, I AM AGAIN MASTER OF MY SHIP--
--AND ALL THAT IT CONTAINS!
FAREWELL, INCINERATORS! YOU SHALL NOT BE MISSED.
WHAT A FEAT OF SPATIAL ENGINEERING! HOW DID YOU DO IT?
WITH THIS BYPASS MODULE. AS YOU CORRECTLY SURMISED, I RECONFIGURED THE INTERIOR OF MY SHIP TO KICK THE INCINERATORS OUT. BESIDES, I AWAYS WANTED TO HAVE A PLACE TO HANG MY PAINTINGS.


MY EBONY BLADE! IT HAS BEEN FULLY RESTORED!
OF COURSE. THE TIME ANOMALY HAS BEEN ELIMINATED...
AND NOW THAT I HAVE THE STARSTONE-- I CAN MAKE CERTAIN THAT IT NEVER OCCURS AGAIN!
THEN -- ALL TIME HAS BEEN SAVED--BY A LITTLE MAN WEARING A BOW TIE?!
AU REVOIR, ANACHRONAUTS! WE MAY MEET AGAIN IN THE ENDLESS CORRIDORS OF TIME.
I HOPE YOU WON'T THINK ME RUDE, PROFESSOR, IF I SAY I'M NOT LOOKING FORWARD TO IT.
HMMF!
...A BOW TIE!
MAY YOU WALK THE PATHS OF GLORY--AND OF TRAGEDY--WITH EQUAL DIGNITY!
GREETINGS, SIR GAMBLE!
AH, MERLIN! GREETINGS! I HAVE A TRADE FOR YOU. THIS STARSTONE FOR YOUR COPY OF THE IRONBOUND BOOK OF SKELOS.
AGREED. FOLLOW ME TO YONDER CAMELOT, GOOD PROFESSOR.
TELL ME, MERLIN, OLD FRIEND--
HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT OF MAKING A SWORD?

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CONTINUING THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF THE
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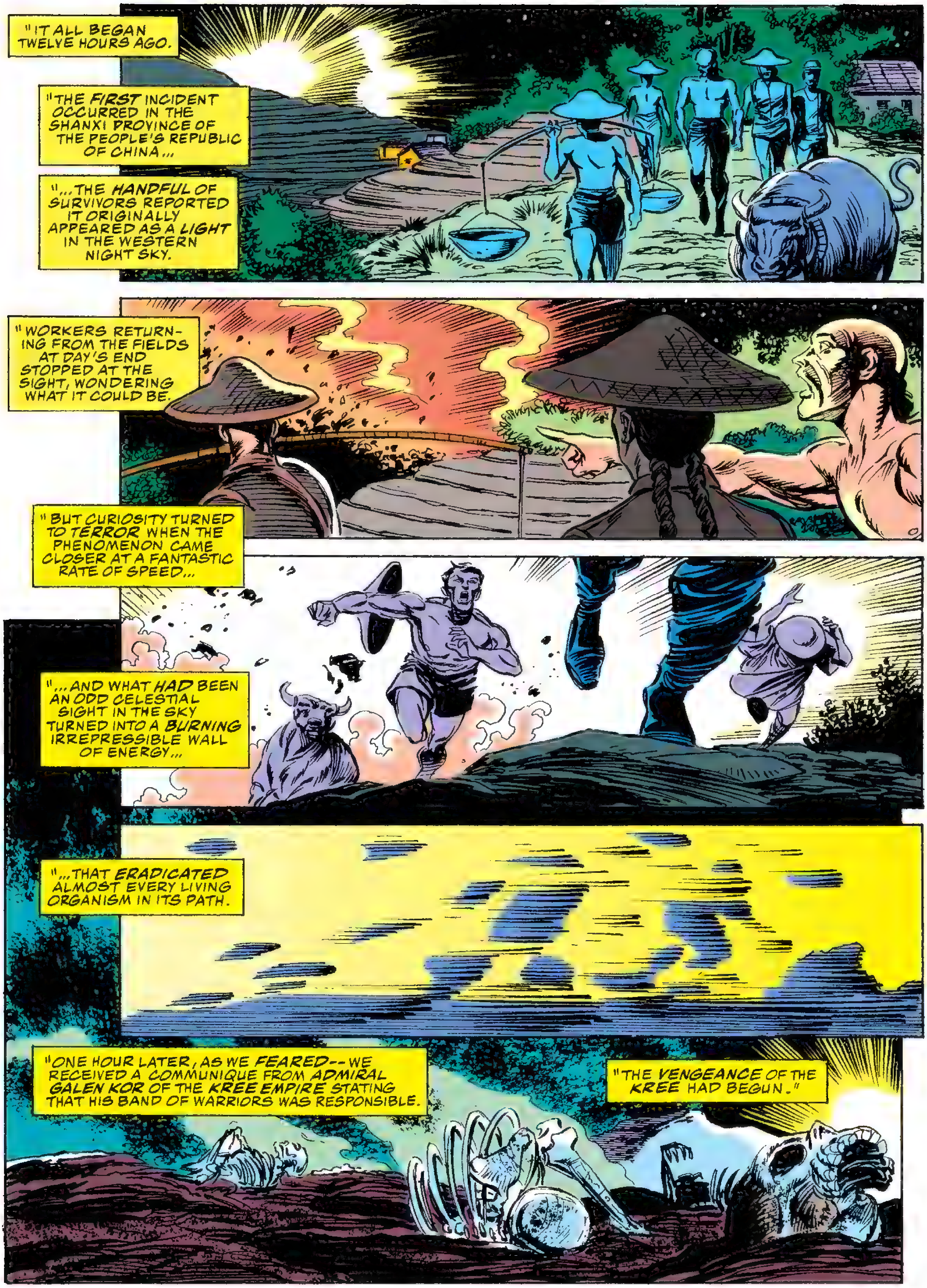
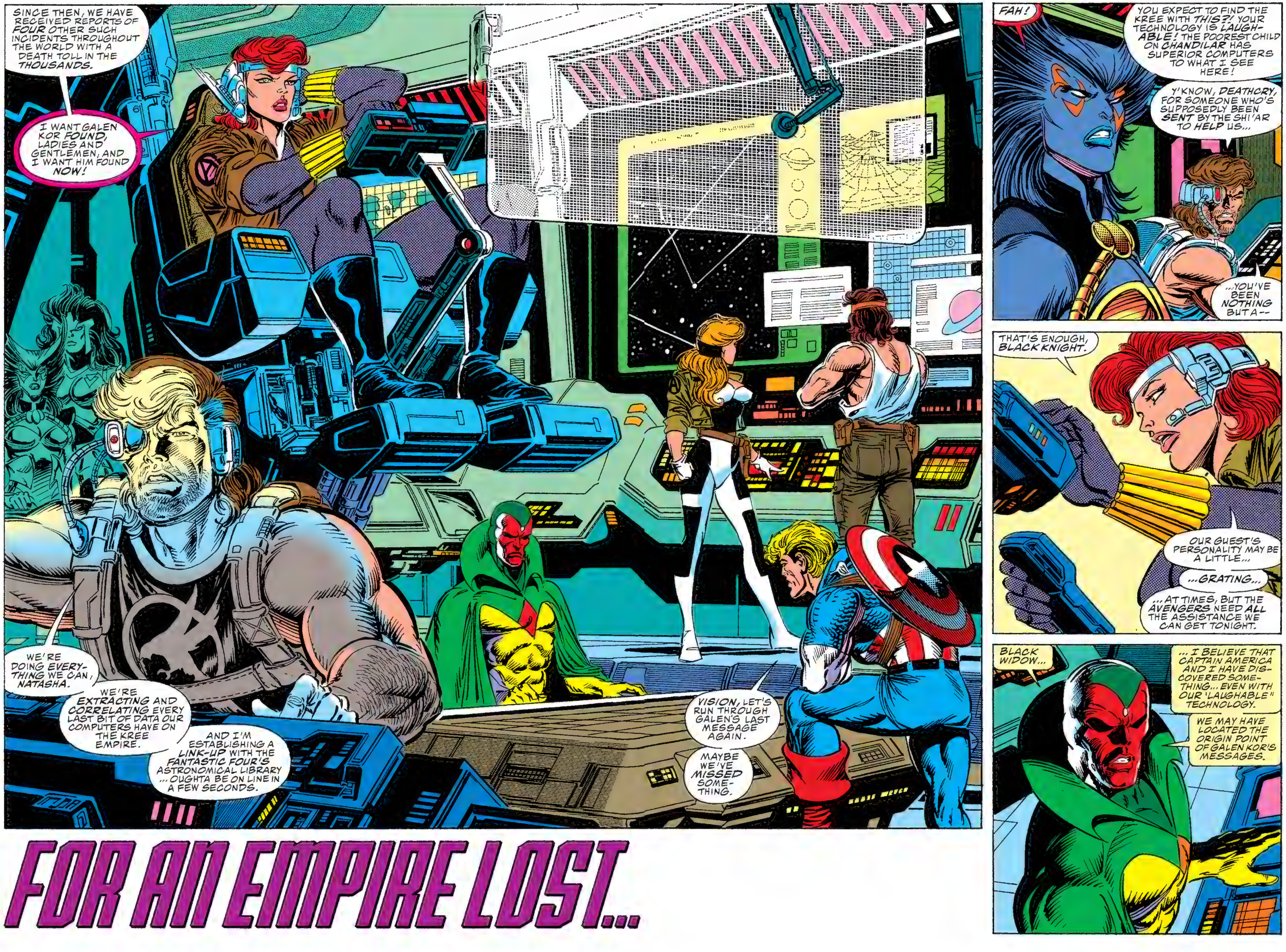
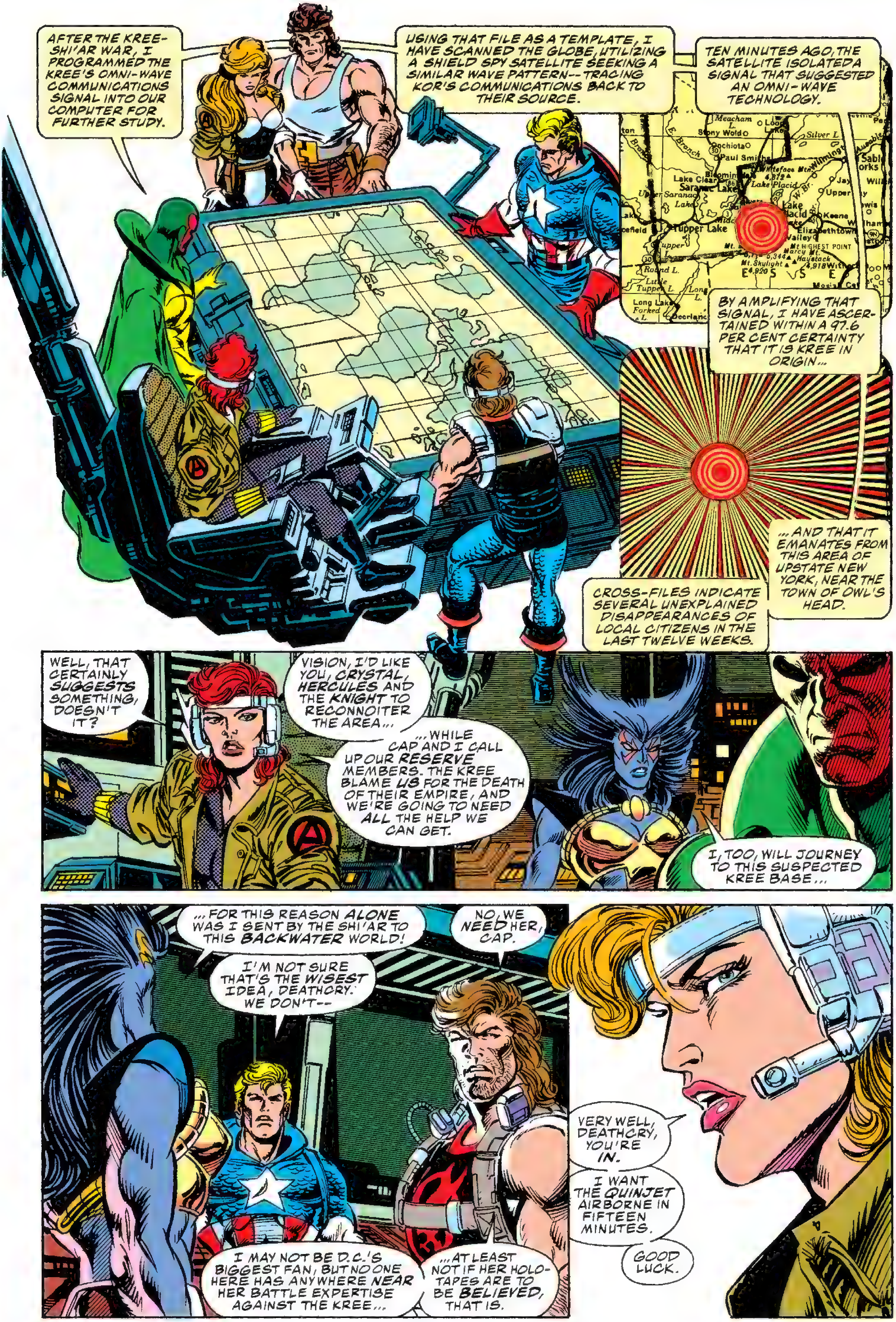
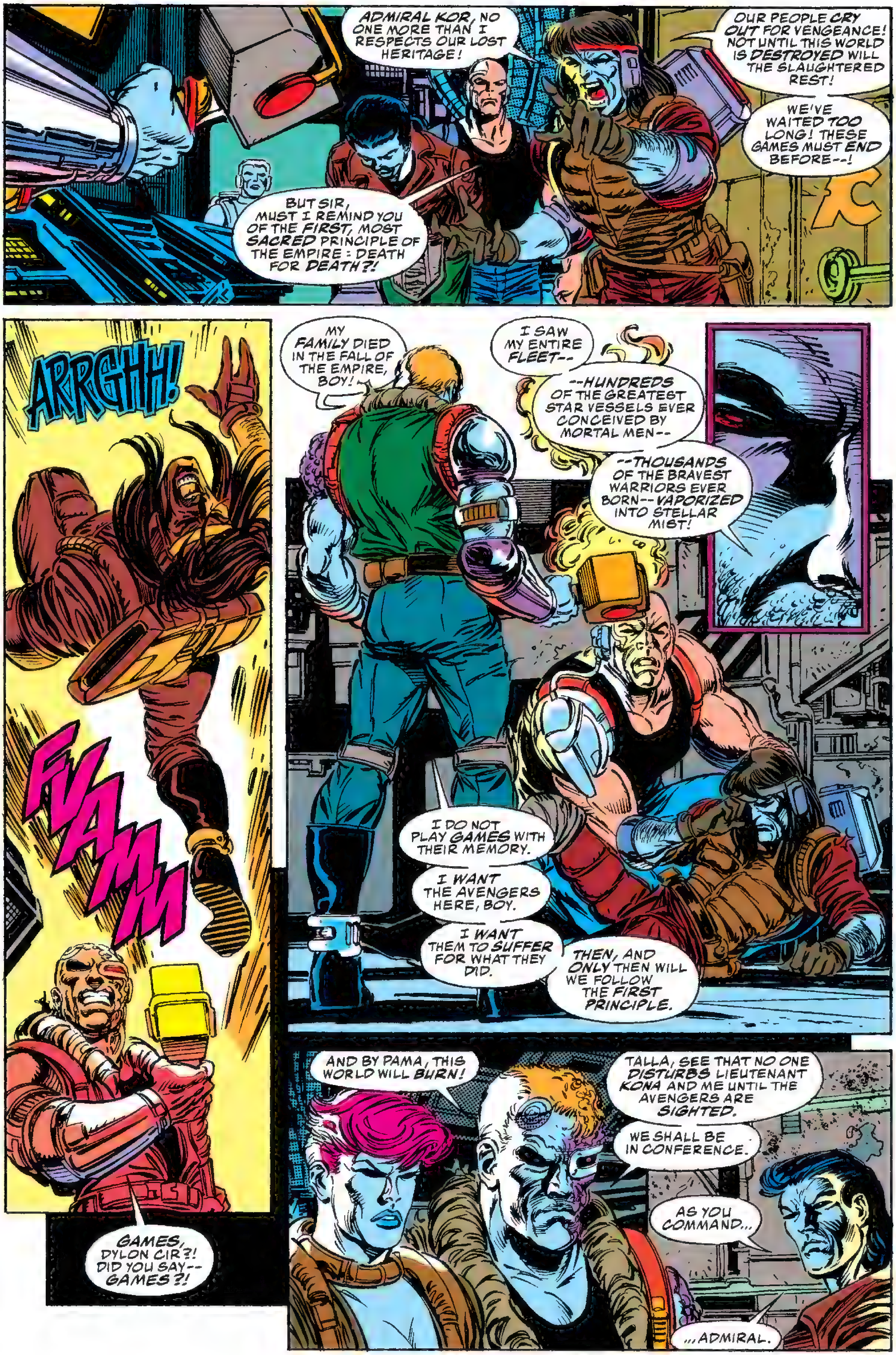
COUNTDOWN

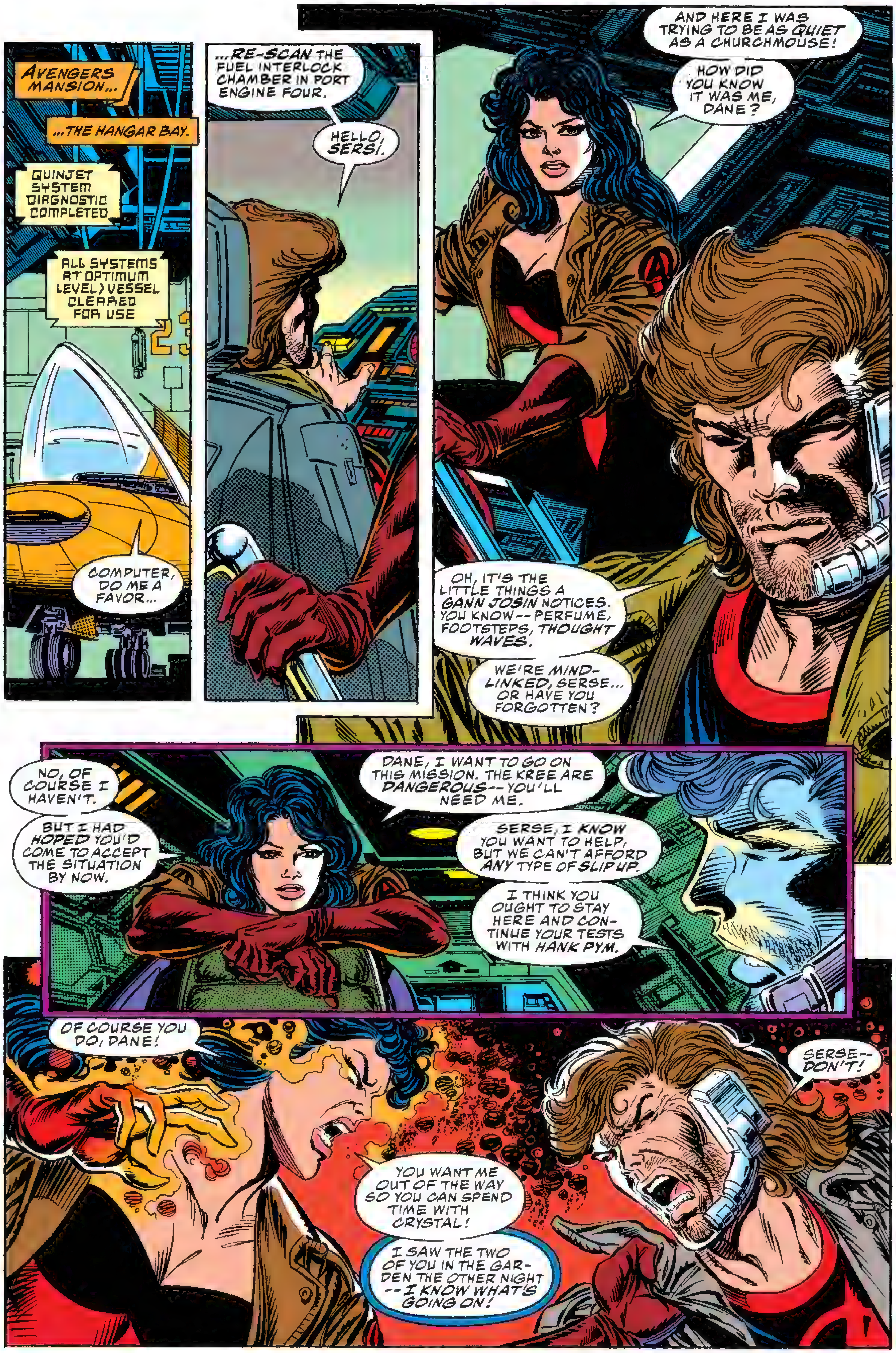

"IT ALL BEGAN TWELVE HOURS AGO.
"THE *FIRST* INCIDENT OCCURRED IN THE SHANXI PROVINCE OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA...
"...THE *HANDFUL* OF SURVIVORS REPORTED IT ORIGINALLY APPEARED AS A *LIGHT* IN THE WESTERN NIGHT SKY.
"WORKERS RETURNING FROM THE FIELDS AT DAY'S END STOPPED AT THE SIGHT, WONDERING WHAT IT COULD BE.
"BUT CURIOSITY TURNED TO *TERROR* WHEN THE PHENOMENON CAME CLOSER AT A FANTASTIC RATE OF SPEED...
"...AND WHAT *HAD* BEEN AN ODD CELESTIAL SIGHT IN THE SKY TURNED INTO A *BURNING* IRREPRESSIBLE WALL OF ENERGY...
"...THAT *ERADICATED* ALMOST EVERY LIVING ORGANISM IN ITS PATH.
"ONE HOUR LATER, AS WE *FEARED*-- WE RECEIVED A COMMUNIQUE FROM *ADMIRAL GALEN KOR* OF THE *KREE EMPIRE* STATING THAT HIS BAND OF WARRIORS WAS RESPONSIBLE.
"THE *VENGEANCE* OF THE *KREE* HAD BEGUN."

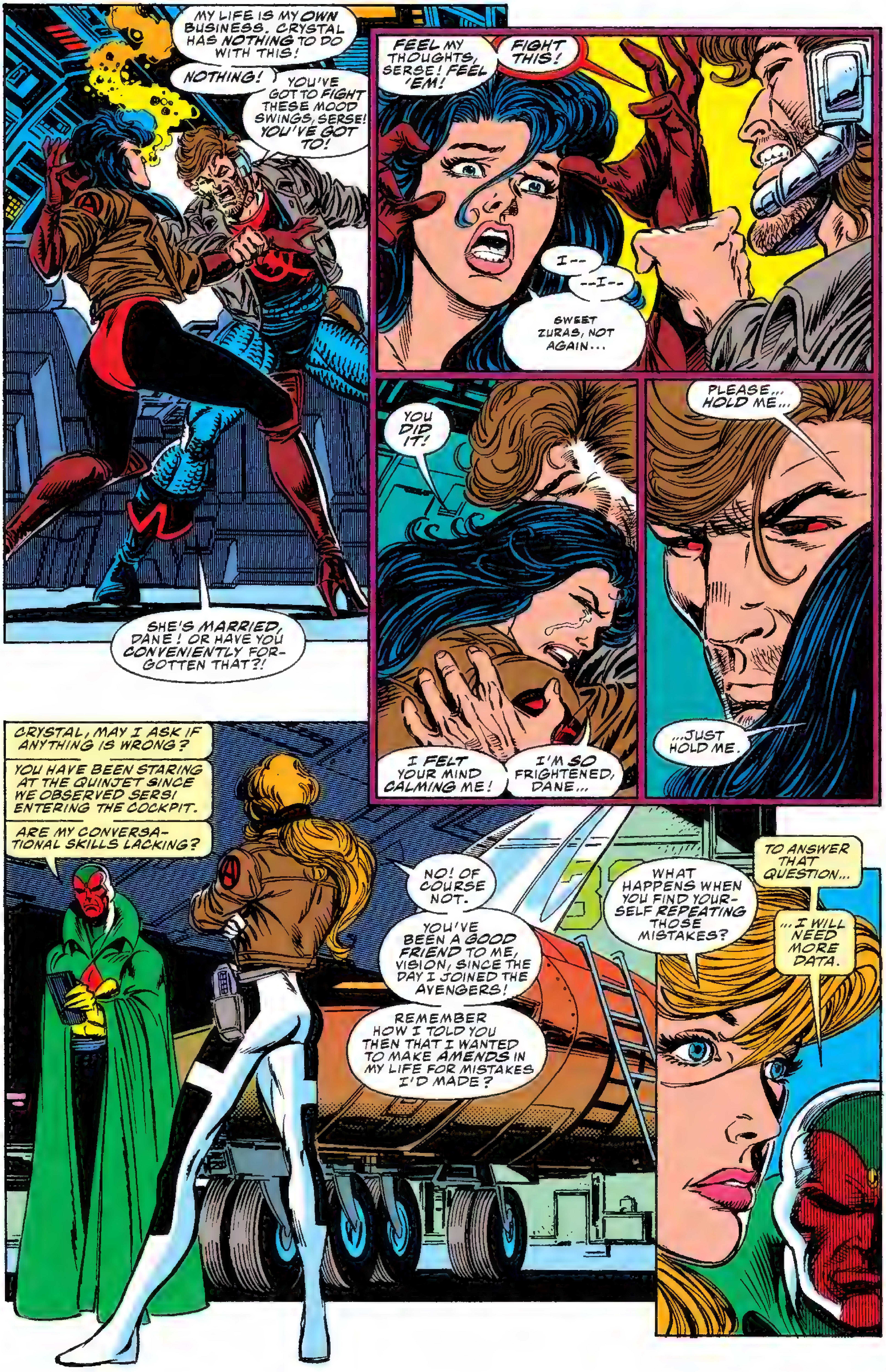

SINCE THEN, WE HAVE RECEIVED REPORTS OF FOUR OTHER SUCH INCIDENTS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD WITH A DEATH TOLL IN THE THOUSANDS.
I WANT GALEN KOR FOUND, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, AND I WANT HIM FOUND NOW!
WE'RE DOING EVERYTHING WE CAN, NATASHA.
WE'RE EXTRACTING AND CORRELATING EVERY LAST BIT OF DATA OUR COMPUTERS HAVE ON THE KREE EMPIRE.
AND I'M ESTABLISHING A LINK-UP WITH THE FANTASTIC FOUR'S ASTRONOMICAL LIBRARY ... OUGHTA BE ON LINE IN A FEW SECONDS.
VISION, LET'S RUN THROUGH GALEN'S LAST MESSAGE AGAIN.
MAYBE WE'VE MISSED SOMETHING.
FAH!
YOU EXPECT TO FIND THE KREE WITH THIS?! YOUR TECHNOLOGY IS LAUGHABLE! THE POOREST CHILD ON CHANDILAR HAS SUPERIOR COMPUTERS TO WHAT I SEE HERE!
Y'KNOW, DEATHCRY, FOR SOMEONE WHO'S SUPPOSEDLY BEEN SENT BY THE SHI'AR TO HELP US...
...YOU'VE BEEN NOTHING BUT A--
THAT'S ENOUGH, BLACK KNIGHT.
OUR GUEST'S PERSONALITY MAY BE A LITTLE...
...GRATING...
...AT TIMES, BUT THE AVENGERS NEED ALL THE ASSISTANCE WE CAN GET TONIGHT.
BLACK WIDOW...
...I BELIEVE THAT CAPTAIN AMERICA AND I HAVE DISCOVERED SOMETHING... EVEN WITH OUR 'LAUGHABLE' TECHNOLOGY.
WE MAY HAVE LOCATED THE ORIGIN POINT OF GALEN KOR'S MESSAGES.
FOR AN EMPIRE LOST...

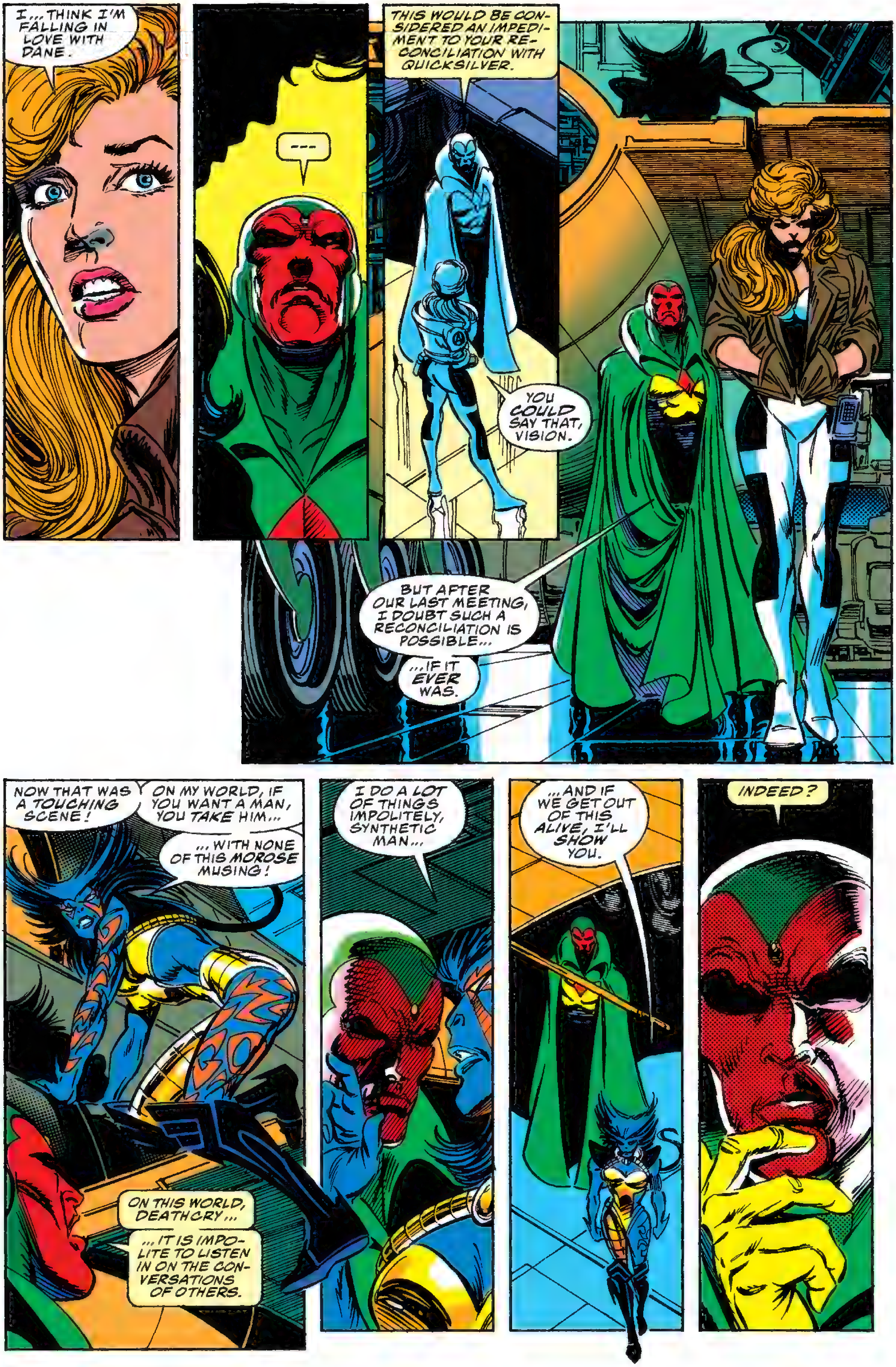

AFTER THE KREE-SHI'AR WAR, I PROGRAMMED THE KREE'S OMNI-WAVE COMMUNICATIONS SIGNAL INTO OUR COMPUTER FOR FURTHER STUDY.
USING THAT FILE AS A TEMPLATE, I HAVE SCANNED THE GLOBE, UTILIZING A SHIELD SPY SATELLITE SEEKING A SIMILAR WAVE PATTERN-- TRACING KOR'S COMMUNICATIONS BACK TO THEIR SOURCE.
TEN MINUTES AGO, THE SATELLITE ISOLATED A SIGNAL THAT SUGGESTED AN OMNI-WAVE TECHNOLOGY.
BY AMPLIFYING THAT SIGNAL, I HAVE ASCERTAINED WITHIN A 97.6 PER CENT CERTAINTY THAT IT IS KREE IN ORIGIN...
...AND THAT IT EMANATES FROM THIS AREA OF UPSTATE NEW YORK, NEAR THE TOWN OF OWL'S HEAD.
CROSS-FILES INDICATE SEVERAL UNEXPLAINED DISAPPEARANCES OF LOCAL CITIZENS IN THE LAST TWELVE WEEKS.
WELL, THAT CERTAINLY SUGGESTS SOMETHING, DOESN'T IT?
VISION, I'D LIKE YOU, CRYSTAL, HERCULES AND THE KNIGHT TO RECONNOITER THE AREA...
...WHILE CAP AND I CALL UP OUR RESERVE MEMBERS. THE KREE BLAME US FOR THE DEATH OF THEIR EMPIRE, AND WE'RE GOING TO NEED ALL THE HELP WE CAN GET.
I, TOO, WILL JOURNEY TO THIS SUSPECTED KREE BASE...
...FOR THIS REASON ALONE WAS I SENT BY THE SHI'AR TO THIS BACKWATER WORLD!
I'M NOT SURE THAT'S THE WISEST IDEA, DEATHCRY. WE DON'T--
NO, WE NEED HER, CAP.
I MAY NOT BE D.C.'S BIGGEST FAN, BUT NO ONE HERE HAS ANYWHERE NEAR HER BATTLE EXPERTISE AGAINST THE KREE...
...AT LEAST NOT IF HER HOLO-TAPES ARE TO BE BELIEVED, THAT IS.
VERY WELL, DEATHCRY, YOU'RE IN.
I WANT THE QUINJET AIRBORNE IN FIFTEEN MINUTES.
GOOD LUCK.

AND, ON AN ISOLATED FARMSTEAD IN UPSTATE NEW YORK...
IT IS CONFIRMED...
...THE TERRAN AVENGERS HAVE LOCKED ONTO OUR SIGNAL. IT IS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE THEY PINPOINT OUR LOCATION.
INDEED, THEY MAY HAVE ALREADY DONE SO.
THEN THIS IS INSANITY!
YOU HAVE BEEN HIS FIRST OFFICER FOR THREE DECADES, TALLA RON! YOU KNOW THE ADMIRAL HAS TIPPED OUR HAND TO THESE EARTHERS TOO SOON.
I DO NOT QUESTION THE ADMIRAL, DYLON CIR! WE HAVE SURVIVED TOO MANY BATTLES TOGETHER FOR THAT!
YOU DO NOT QUESTION--?!
WHEN HE DELIBERATELY UNCLOAKS OUR OMNI-SIGNATURE?
ARE YOU AS MAD AS HE, WOMAN?
NO. SHE IS NOT.
SHE IS KREE. AND AS SUCH, SHE BOTH HONORS AND RESPECTS THE CHAIN OF COMMAND AND THE RIGHTS OF AUTHORITY.
OUR PEOPLE HAVE EVER BEEN THUS, AND IN THESE CRUEL DAYS WE MUST NOT FORGET OUR HERITAGE!

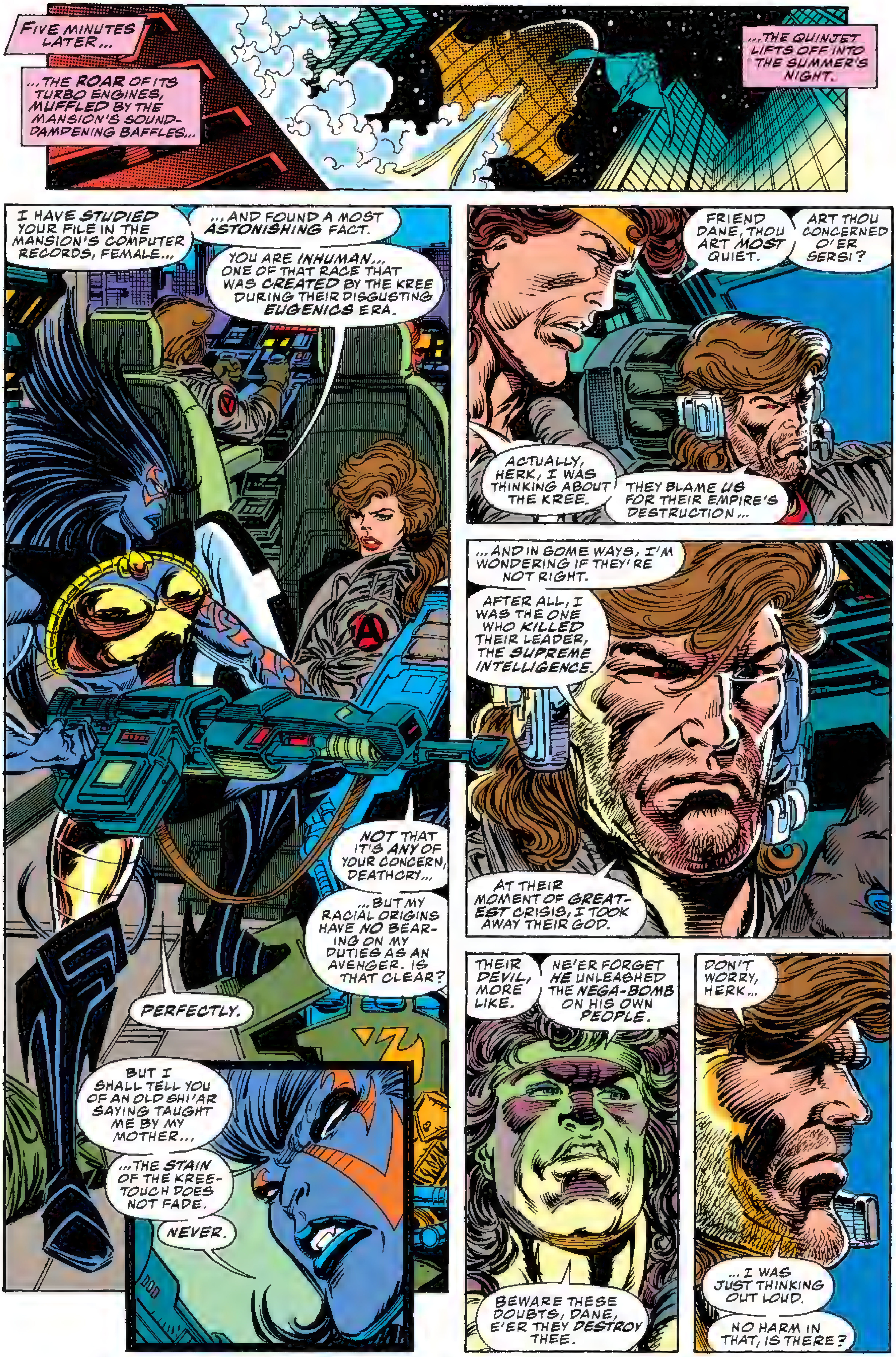

ADMIRAL KOR, NO ONE MORE THAN I RESPECTS OUR LOST HERITAGE!
OUR PEOPLE CRY OUT FOR VENGEANCE! NOT UNTIL THIS WORLD IS DESTROYED WILL THE SLAUGHTERED REST!
WE'VE WAITED TOO LONG! THESE GAMES MUST END BEFORE--!
BUT SIR, MUST I REMIND YOU OF THE FIRST, MOST SACRED PRINCIPLE OF THE EMPIRE : DEATH FOR DEATH?!
ARRGHH!
FVAMMM
GAMES, DYLON CIR?! DID YOU SAY-- GAMES?!
MY FAMILY DIED IN THE FALL OF THE EMPIRE, BOY!
I SAW MY ENTIRE FLEET--
--HUNDREDS OF THE GREATEST STAR VESSELS EVER CONCEIVED BY MORTAL MEN--
--THOUSANDS OF THE BRAVEST WARRIORS EVER BORN--VAPORIZED INTO STELLAR MIST!
I DO NOT PLAY GAMES WITH THEIR MEMORY.
I WANT THE AVENGERS HERE, BOY.
I WANT THEM TO SUFFER FOR WHAT THEY DID.
THEN, AND ONLY THEN WILL WE FOLLOW THE FIRST PRINCIPLE.
AND BY PAMA, THIS WORLD WILL BURN!
TALLA, SEE THAT NO ONE DISTURBS LIEUTENANT KONA AND ME UNTIL THE AVENGERS ARE SIGHTED.
WE SHALL BE IN CONFERENCE.
AS YOU COMMAND...
...ADMIRAL.


AVENGERS MANSION...
...THE HANGAR BAY.
QUINJET SYSTEM DIAGNOSTIC COMPLETED
ALL SYSTEMS AT OPTIMUM LEVEL) VESSEL CLEARED FOR USE
COMPUTER, DO ME A FAVOR...
...RE-SCAN THE FUEL INTERLOCK CHAMBER IN PORT ENGINE FOUR.
HELLO, SERSI.
AND HERE I WAS TRYING TO BE AS QUIET AS A CHURCHMOUSE!
HOW DID YOU KNOW IT WAS ME, DANE?
OH, IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS A GANN JOSIN NOTICES. YOU KNOW--PERFUME, FOOTSTEPS, THOUGHT WAVES.
WE'RE MIND-LINKED, SERSE... OR HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN?
NO, OF COURSE I HAVEN'T.
BUT I HAD HOPED YOU'D COME TO ACCEPT THE SITUATION BY NOW.
DANE, I WANT TO GO ON THIS MISSION. THE KREE ARE DANGEROUS--YOU'LL NEED ME.
SERSE, I KNOW YOU WANT TO HELP, BUT WE CAN'T AFFORD ANY TYPE OF SLIP UP.
I THINK YOU OUGHT TO STAY HERE AND CONTINUE YOUR TESTS WITH HANK PYM.
OF COURSE YOU DO, DANE!
YOU WANT ME OUT OF THE WAY SO YOU CAN SPEND TIME WITH CRYSTAL!
I SAW THE TWO OF YOU IN THE GARDEN THE OTHER NIGHT--I KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON!
SERSE--DON'T!

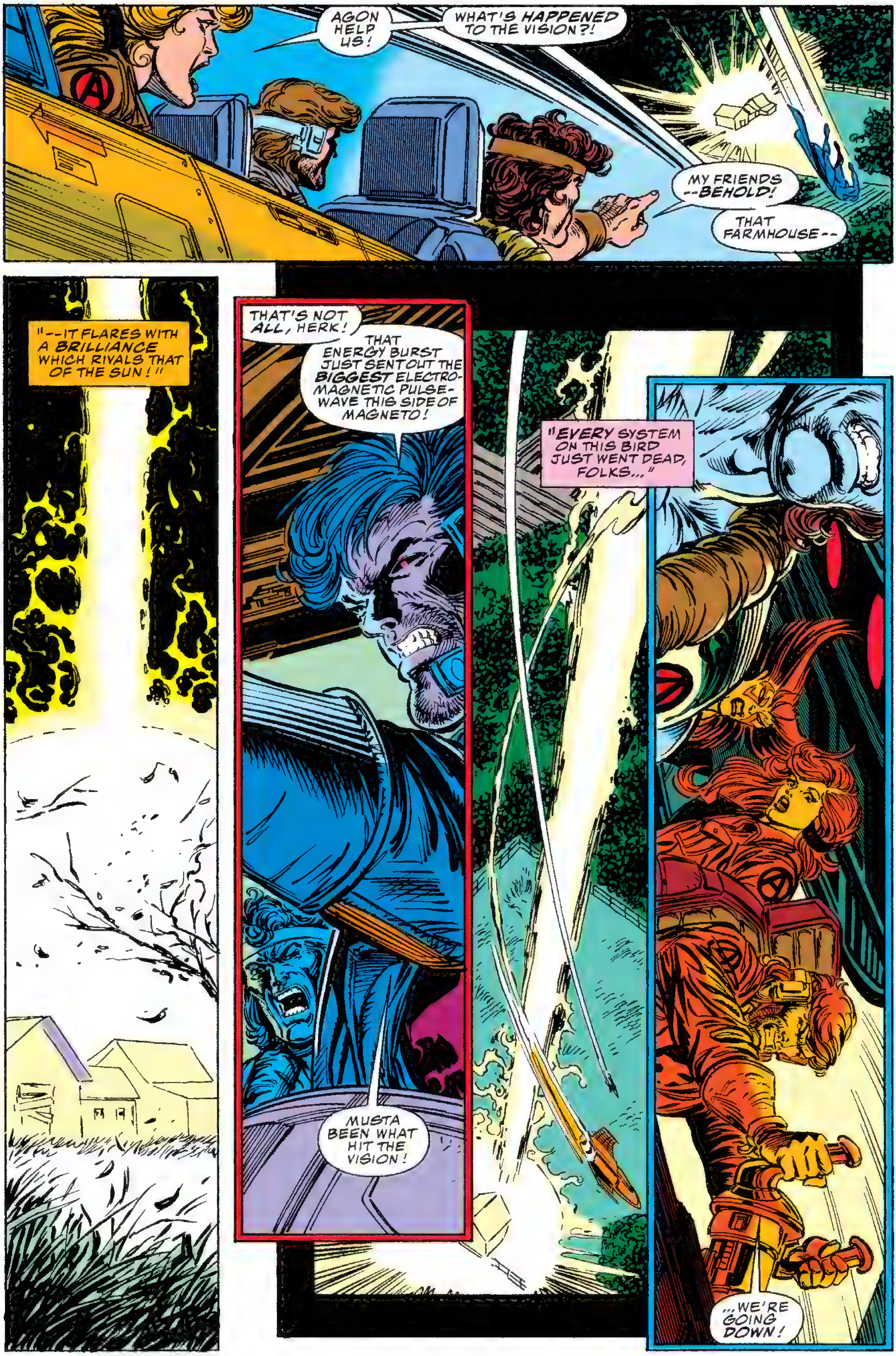

MY LIFE IS MY OWN BUSINESS. CRYSTAL HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THIS!
NOTHING!
YOU'VE GOT TO FIGHT THESE MOOD SWINGS, SERSE! YOU'VE GOT TO!
SHE'S MARRIED, DANE! OR HAVE YOU CONVENIENTLY FORGOTTEN THAT?!
FEEL MY THOUGHTS, SERSE! FEEL 'EM!
FIGHT THIS!
I--
--I--
SWEET ZURAS, NOT AGAIN...
YOU DID IT!
I FELT YOUR MIND CALMING ME!
I'M SO FRIGHTENED, DANE...
PLEASE... HOLD ME...
...JUST HOLD ME.
CRYSTAL, MAY I ASK IF ANYTHING IS WRONG?
YOU HAVE BEEN STARING AT THE QUINJET SINCE WE OBSERVED SERSI ENTERING THE COCKPIT.
ARE MY CONVERSATIONAL SKILLS LACKING?
NO! OF COURSE NOT.
YOU'VE BEEN A GOOD FRIEND TO ME, VISION, SINCE THE DAY I JOINED THE AVENGERS!
REMEMBER HOW I TOLD YOU THEN THAT I WANTED TO MAKE AMENDS IN MY LIFE FOR MISTAKES I'D MADE?
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU FIND YOURSELF REPEATING THOSE MISTAKES?
TO ANSWER THAT QUESTION...
...I WILL NEED MORE DATA.

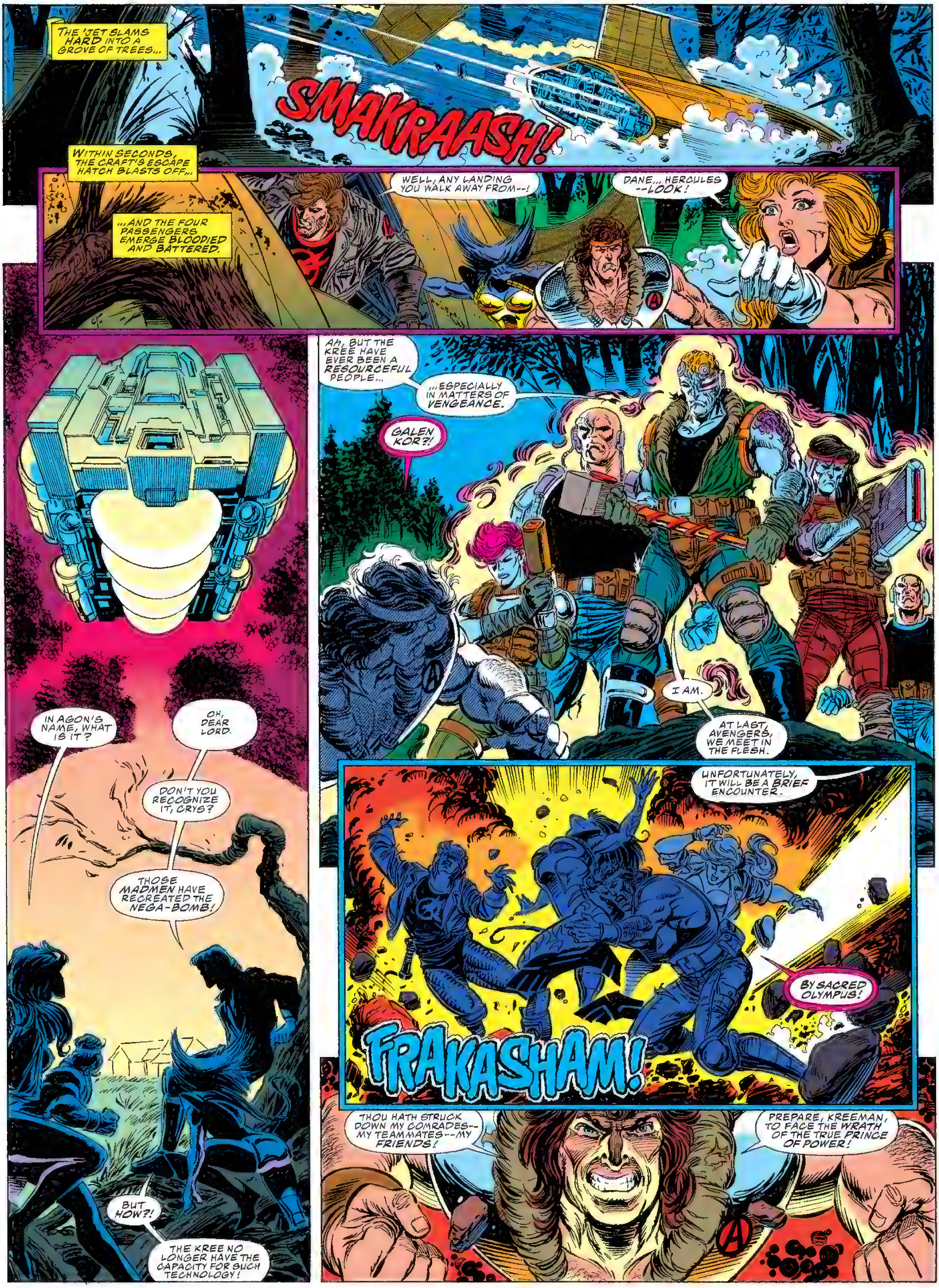

I... THINK I'M FALLING IN LOVE WITH DANE.

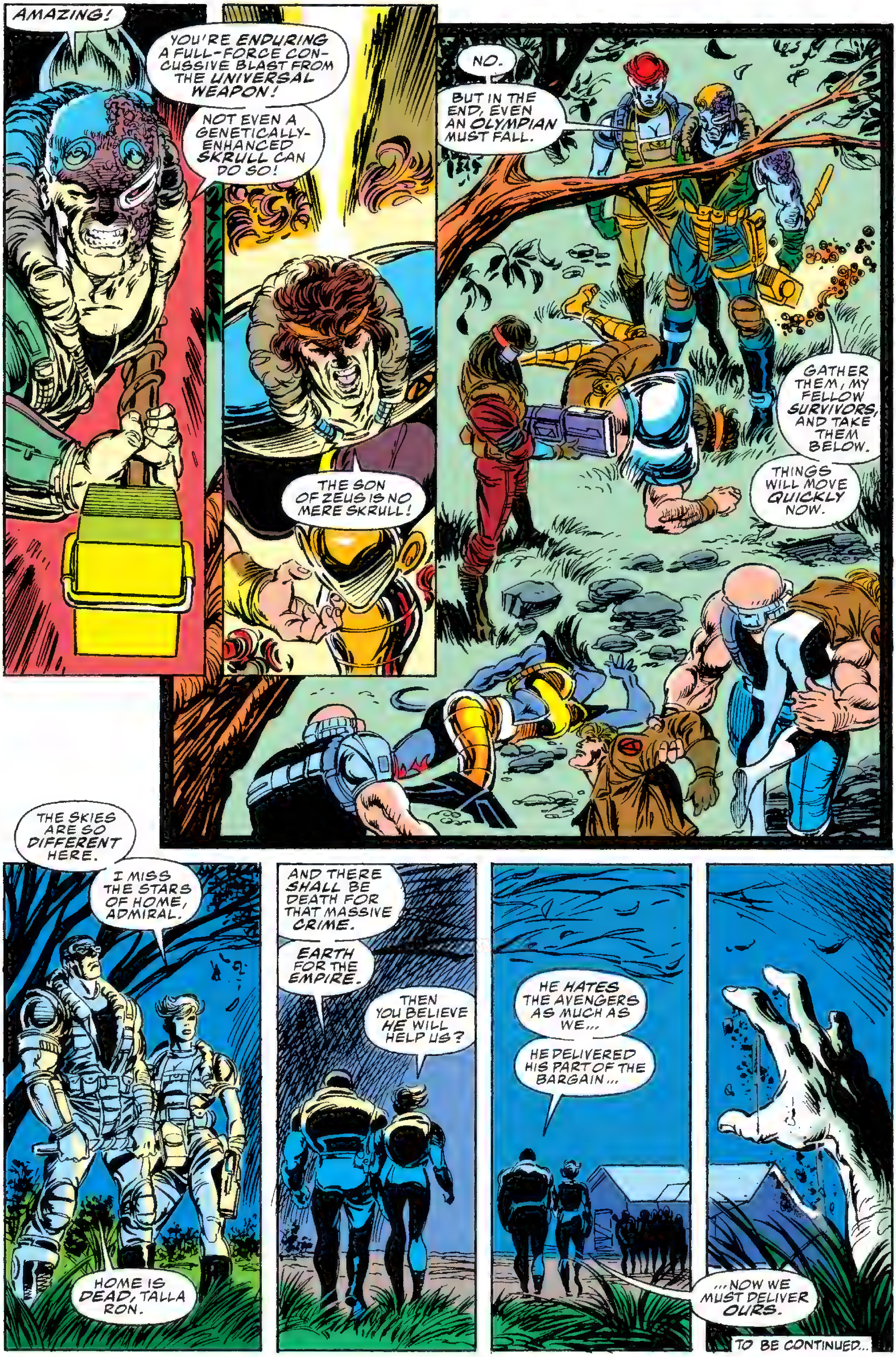
THIS WOULD BE CONSIDERED AN IMPEDIMENT TO YOUR RECONCILIATION WITH QUICKSILVER.
YOU *COULD* SAY THAT, VISION.
BUT AFTER OUR LAST MEETING, I DOUBT SUCH A RECONCILIATION IS POSSIBLE...
...IF IT *EVER* WAS.
NOW THAT WAS A *TOUCHING* SCENE!
ON MY WORLD, IF YOU WANT A MAN, YOU *TAKE* HIM...
...WITH NONE OF THIS *MOROSE* MUSING!
ON THIS WORLD, DEATHCRY...
...IT IS IMPOLITE TO LISTEN IN ON THE CONVERSATIONS OF OTHERS.
I DO A *LOT* OF THINGS IMPOLITELY, SYNTHETIC MAN...
...AND IF WE GET OUT OF THIS ALIVE, I'LL *SHOW* YOU.
INDEED?

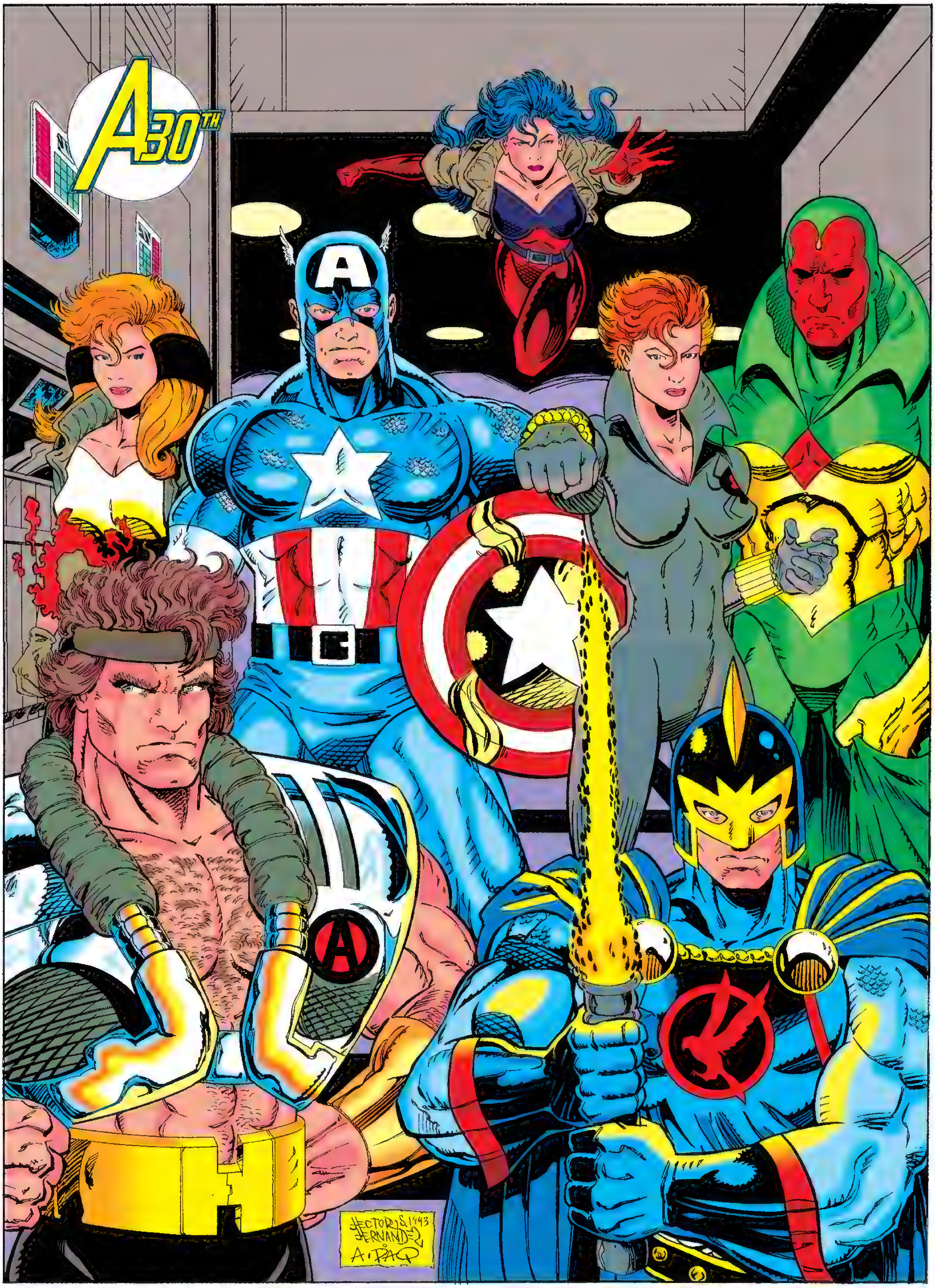

FIVE MINUTES LATER...
...THE ROAR OF ITS TURBO ENGINES, MUFFLED BY THE MANSION'S SOUND-DAMPENING BAFFLES...
...THE QUINJET LIFTS OFF INTO THE SUMMER'S NIGHT.
I HAVE STUDIED YOUR FILE IN THE MANSION'S COMPUTER RECORDS, FEMALE...
...AND FOUND A MOST ASTONISHING FACT.
YOU ARE INHUMAN... ONE OF THAT RACE THAT WAS CREATED BY THE KREE DURING THEIR DISGUSTING EUGENICS ERA.
NOT THAT IT'S ANY OF YOUR CONCERN, DEATHCRY...
...BUT MY RACIAL ORIGINS HAVE NO BEARING ON MY DUTIES AS AN AVENGER. IS THAT CLEAR?
PERFECTLY.
BUT I SHALL TELL YOU OF AN OLD SHI'AR SAYING TAUGHT ME BY MY MOTHER...
...THE STAIN OF THE KREE-TOUCH DOES NOT FADE.
NEVER.
FRIEND DANE, THOU ART MOST QUIET.
ART THOU CONCERNED O'ER SERSI?
ACTUALLY, HERK, I WAS THINKING ABOUT THE KREE.
THEY BLAME US FOR THEIR EMPIRE'S DESTRUCTION...
...AND IN SOME WAYS, I'M WONDERING IF THEY'RE NOT RIGHT.
AFTER ALL, I WAS THE ONE WHO KILLED THEIR LEADER, THE SUPREME INTELLIGENCE.
AT THEIR MOMENT OF GREATEST CRISIS, I TOOK AWAY THEIR GOD.
THEIR DEVIL, MORE LIKE.
NE'ER FORGET HE UNLEASHED THE NEGA-BOMB ON HIS OWN PEOPLE.
BEWARE THESE DOUBTS, DANE, E'ER THEY DESTROY THEE.
DON'T WORRY, HERK...
...I WAS JUST THINKING OUT LOUD.
NO HARM IN THAT, IS THERE?

HE SAILS THE NIGHT WIND SILENTLY...
...ALONE, APART FROM HIS FELLOW AVENGERS.
AND IF HE TAKES DELIGHT IN THE SENSATION OF THE COOL BREEZE PASSING THROUGH HIS GHOSTLY FORM, HE GIVES NO SIGN.
FOR HIS THOUGHTS ARE ELSEWHERE...
...AS HIS COMPUTERIZED MIND ENDLESSLY REPLAYS ONE SPOKEN LINE...
"I... THINK I'M FALLING IN LOVE WITH DANE."
WHY THIS IS SO, HE CANNOT FATHOM...
...AND HE WOULD ANALYZE THIS PECULIARITY FURTHER IF THERE WERE NOT NOW OTHER THINGS TO DO.
AVENGERS, WE ARE OVER THE APPROXIMATE COORDINATES.
BUT INTRIGUINGLY, I CAN FIND NO TRACE OF THE KREE OMNI-WAVE SIGNAL.
ADMIRAL THEY ARE IN POSITION.
THEN WE HAVE THEM.
THE DEVICE SHOULD BE IN ORBIT NOW. ENGAGE THE TRACTOR BEAM.
AVENGERS, A CORRECTION.
THERE HAS BEEN A SUDDEN SPIKE IN THE ENERGY READI
NNGSS
AND SUDDENLY...
...THE WIND CARRIES HIM NO LONGER.


AGON HELP US!
WHAT'S HAPPENED TO THE VISION?!
MY FRIENDS --BEHOLD!
THAT FARMHOUSE--
"--IT FLARES WITH A BRILLIANCE WHICH RIVALS THAT OF THE SUN!"
THAT'S NOT ALL, HERK!
THAT ENERGY BURST JUST SENT OUT THE BIGGEST ELECTRO-MAGNETIC PULSE-WAVE THIS SIDE OF MAGNETO!
MUSTA BEEN WHAT HIT THE VISION!
"EVERY SYSTEM ON THIS BIRD JUST WENT DEAD, FOLKS..."
...WE'RE GOING DOWN!


THE 'JET SLAMS HARD INTO A GROVE OF TREES...
SMAKRAASH!
WITHIN SECONDS, THE CRAFT'S ESCAPE HATCH BLASTS OFF...
...AND THE FOUR PASSENGERS EMERGE BLOODIED AND BATTERED.
WELL, ANY LANDING YOU WALK AWAY FROM--!
DANE... HERCULES --LOOK!
IN AGON'S NAME, WHAT IS IT?
OH, DEAR LORD.
DON'T YOU RECOGNIZE IT, CRYS?
THOSE MADMEN HAVE RECREATED THE NEGA-BOMB!
BUT HOW?!
THE KREE NO LONGER HAVE THE CAPACITY FOR SUCH TECHNOLOGY!
AH, BUT THE KREE HAVE EVER BEEN A RESOURCEFUL PEOPLE...
...ESPECIALLY IN MATTERS OF VENGEANCE.
GALEN KOR?!
I AM.
AT LAST, AVENGERS, WE MEET IN THE FLESH.
UNFORTUNATELY, IT WILL BE A BRIEF ENCOUNTER.
BY SACRED OLYMPUS!
FRAKASHAM!
THOU HATH STRUCK DOWN MY COMRADES-- MY TEAMMATES--MY FRIENDS!
PREPARE, KREEMAN, TO FACE THE WRATH OF THE TRUE PRINCE OF POWER!


AMAZING!
YOU'RE ENDURING A FULL-FORCE CONCUSSIVE BLAST FROM THE UNIVERSAL WEAPON!
NOT EVEN A GENETICALLY-ENHANCED SKRULL CAN DO SO!
THE SON OF ZEUS IS NO MERE SKRULL!
NO.
BUT IN THE END, EVEN AN OLYMPIAN MUST FALL.
GATHER THEM, MY FELLOW SURVIVORS, AND TAKE THEM BELOW.
THINGS WILL MOVE QUICKLY NOW.
THE SKIES ARE SO DIFFERENT HERE.
I MISS THE STARS OF HOME, ADMIRAL.
HOME IS DEAD, TALLA RON.
AND THERE SHALL BE DEATH FOR THAT MASSIVE CRIME.
EARTH FOR THE EMPIRE.
THEN YOU BELIEVE HE WILL HELP US?
HE HATES THE AVENGERS AS MUCH AS WE...
HE DELIVERED HIS PART OF THE BARGAIN...
...NOW WE MUST DELIVER OURS.
TO BE CONTINUED...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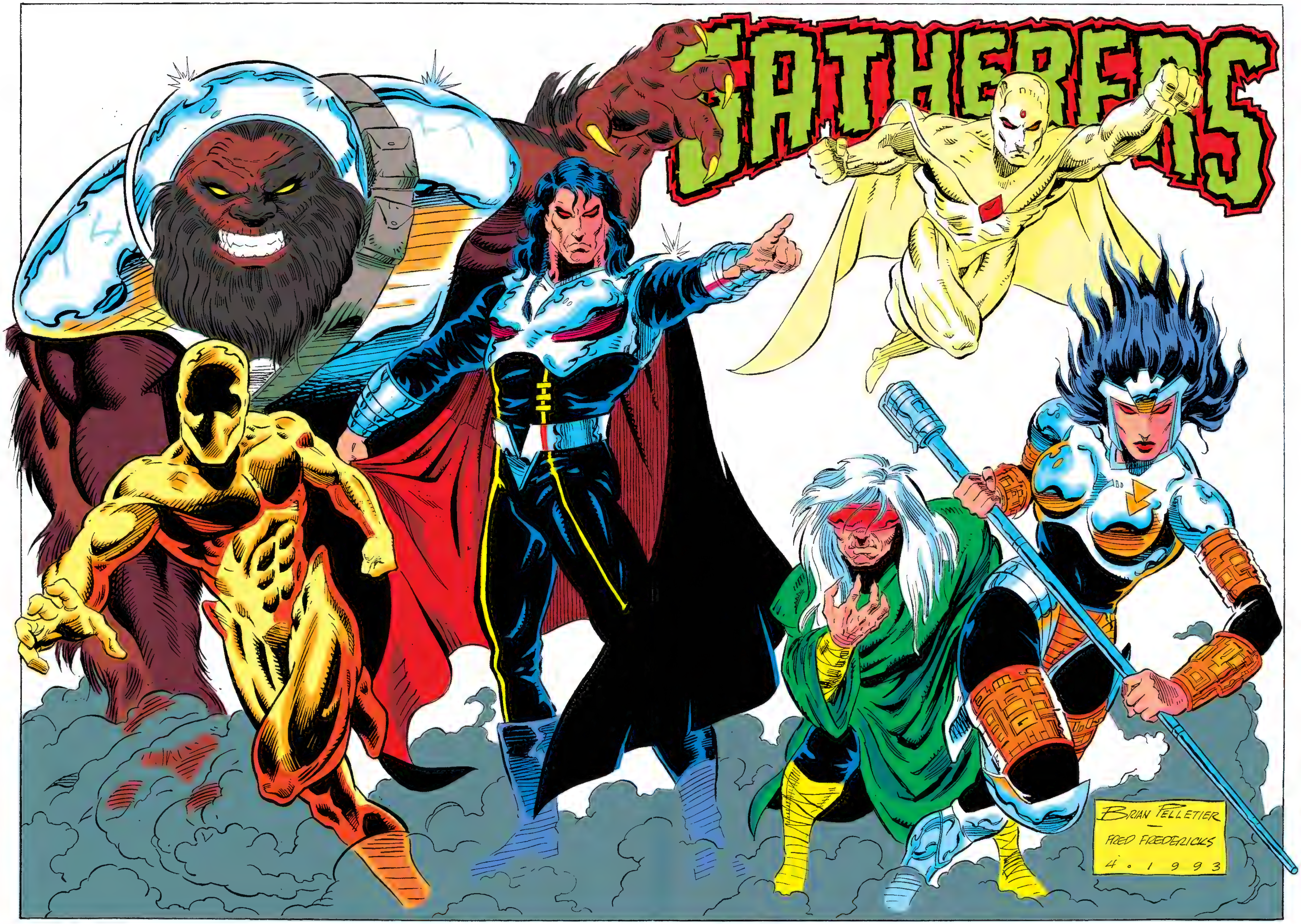
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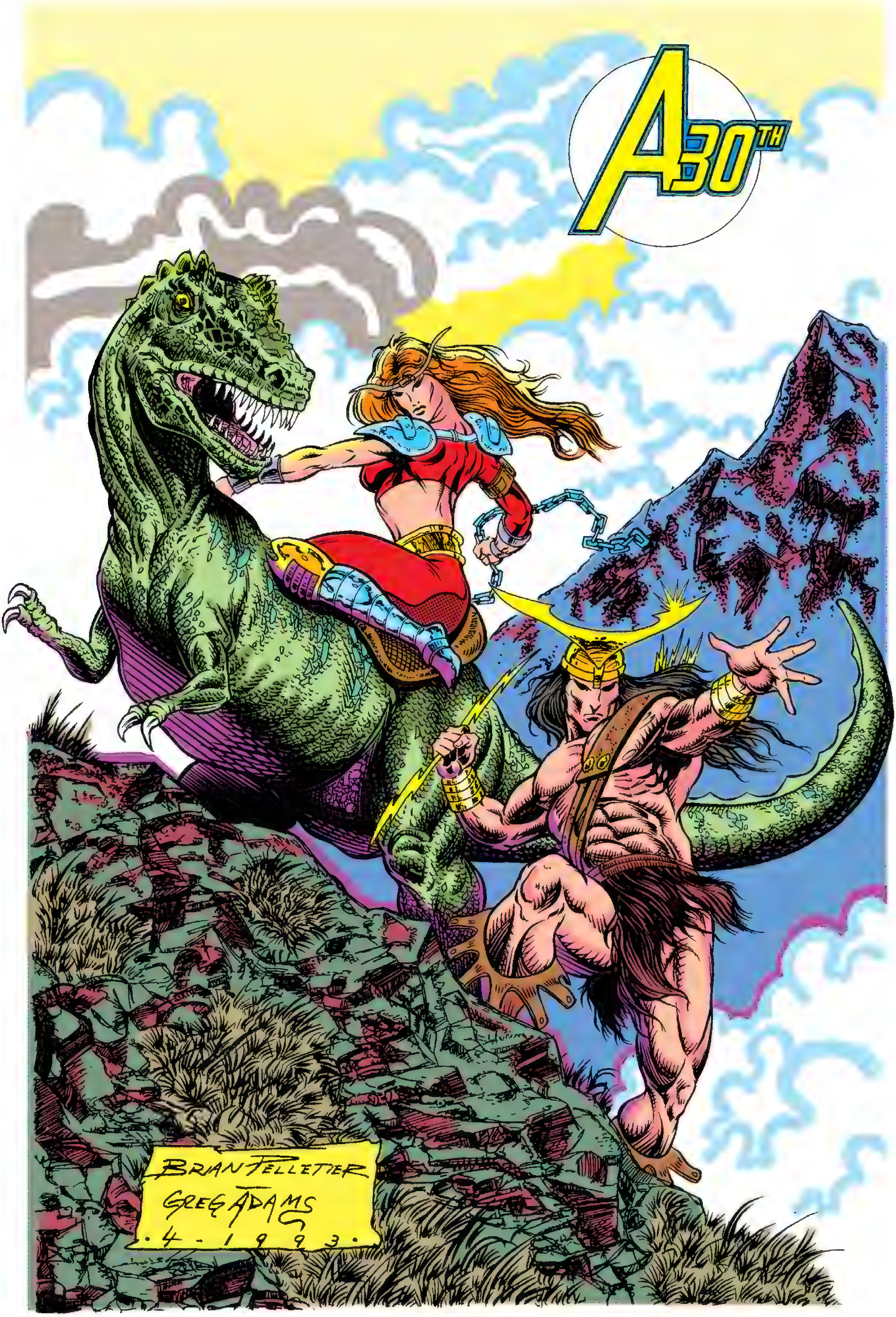
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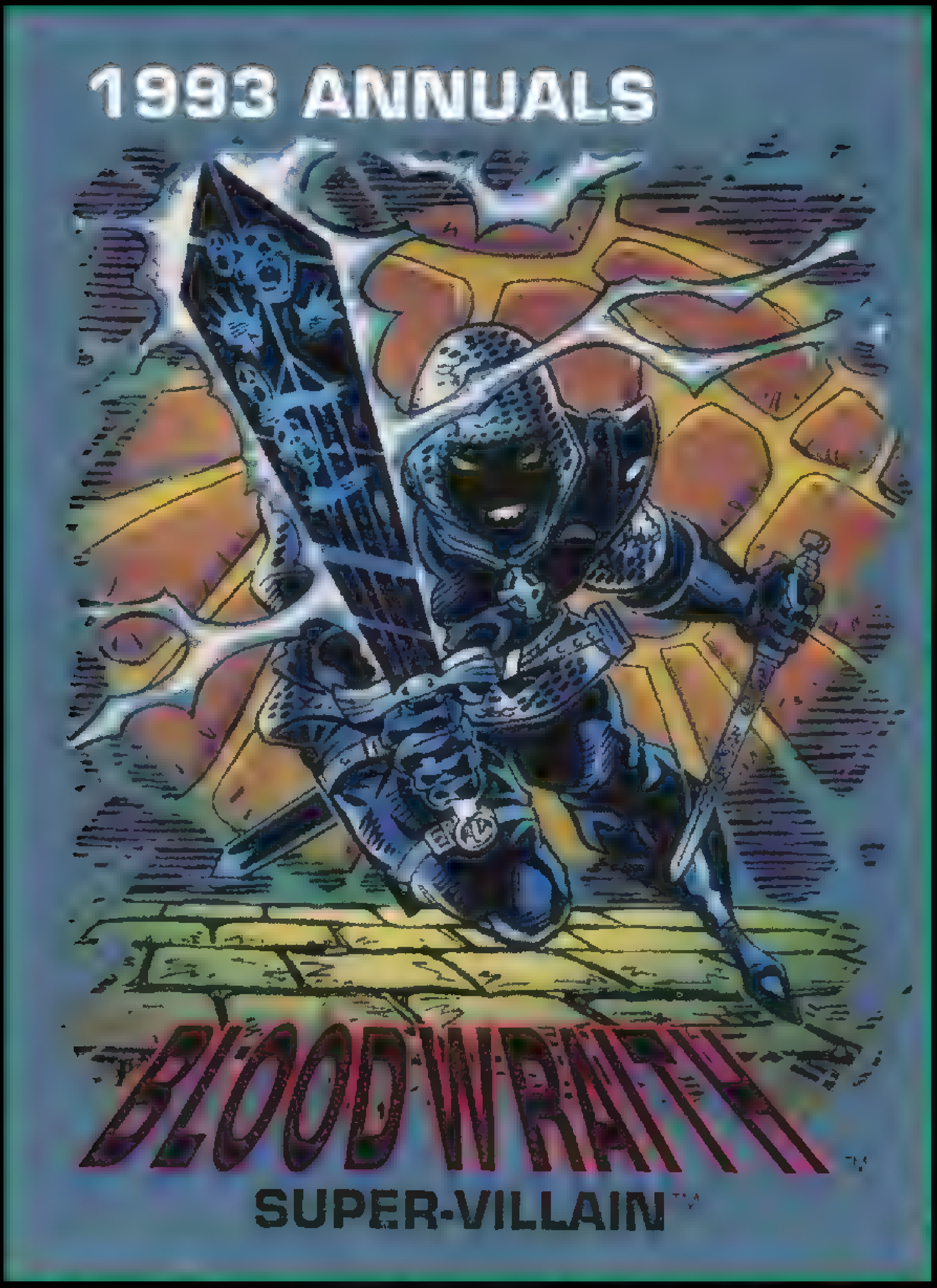
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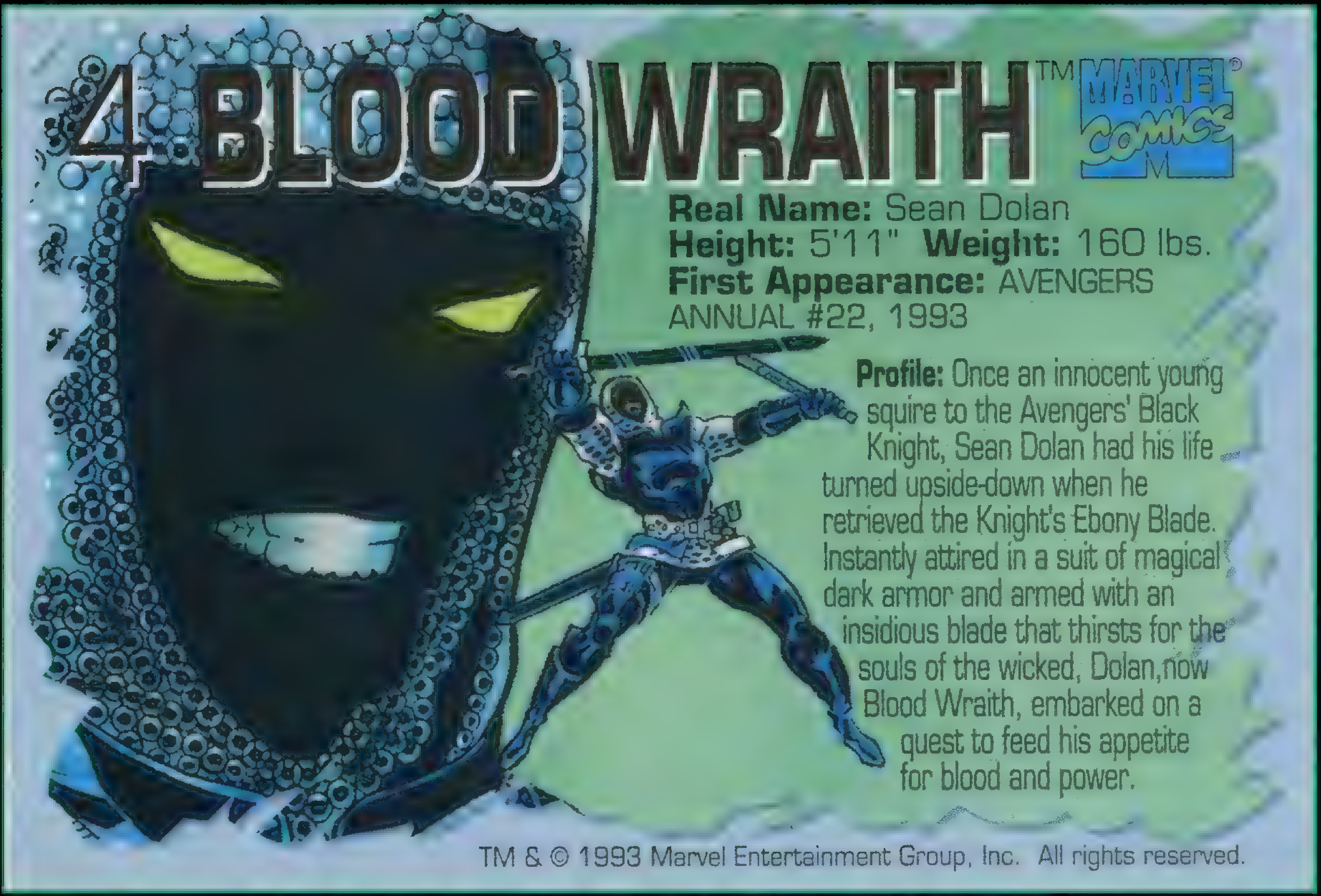
MARVEL COMICS

4 BLOOD WRAITH™

Real Name: Sean Dolan
Height: 5'11" **Weight:** 160 lbs.
First Appearance: AVENGERS ANNUAL #22, 1993

Profile: Once an innocent young squire to the Avengers' Black Knight, Sean Dolan had his life turned upside-down when he retrieved the Knight's Ebony Blade. Instantly attired in a suit of magical dark armor and armed with an insidious blade that thirsts for the souls of the wicked, Dolan, now Blood Wraith, embarked on a quest to feed his appetite for blood and power.

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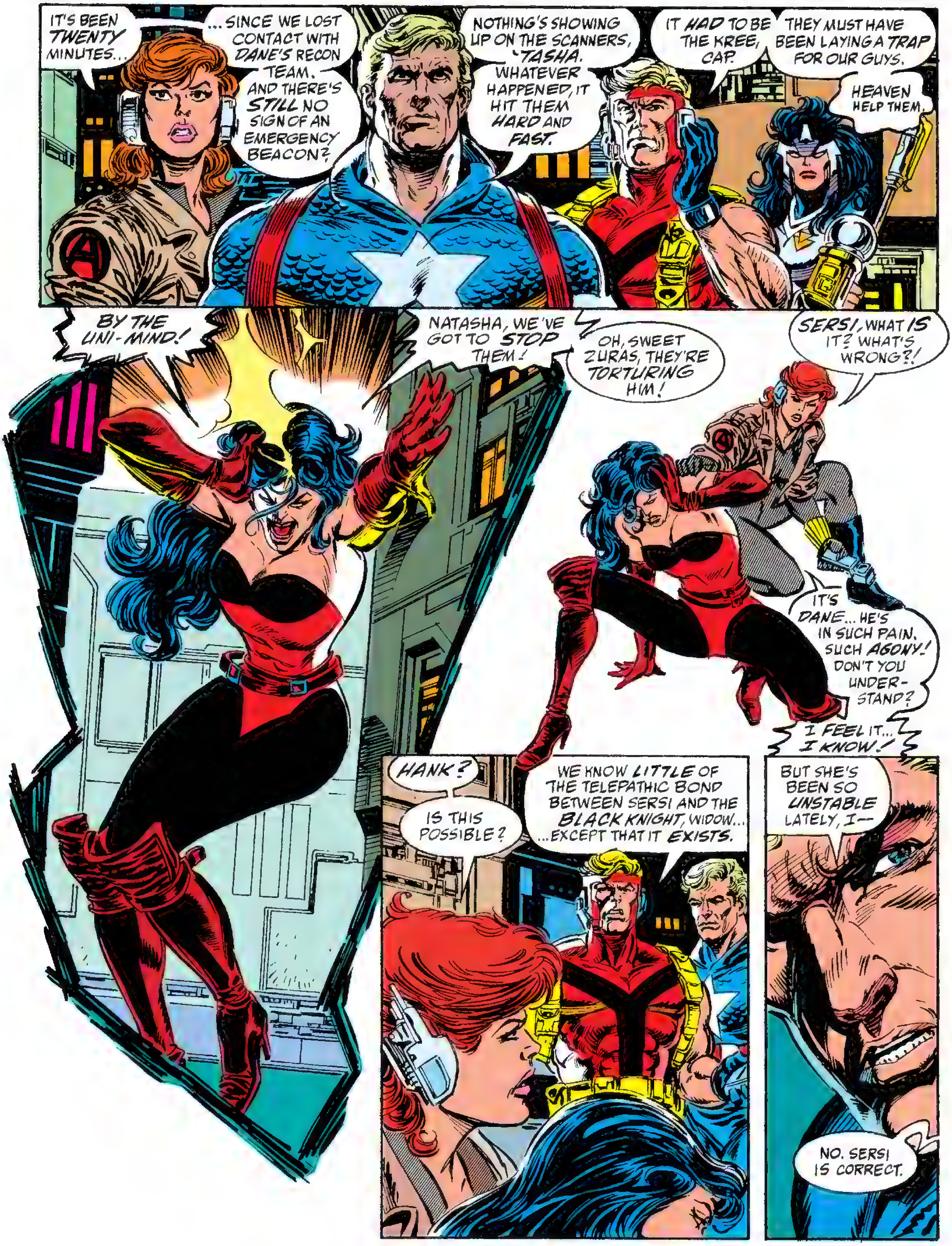
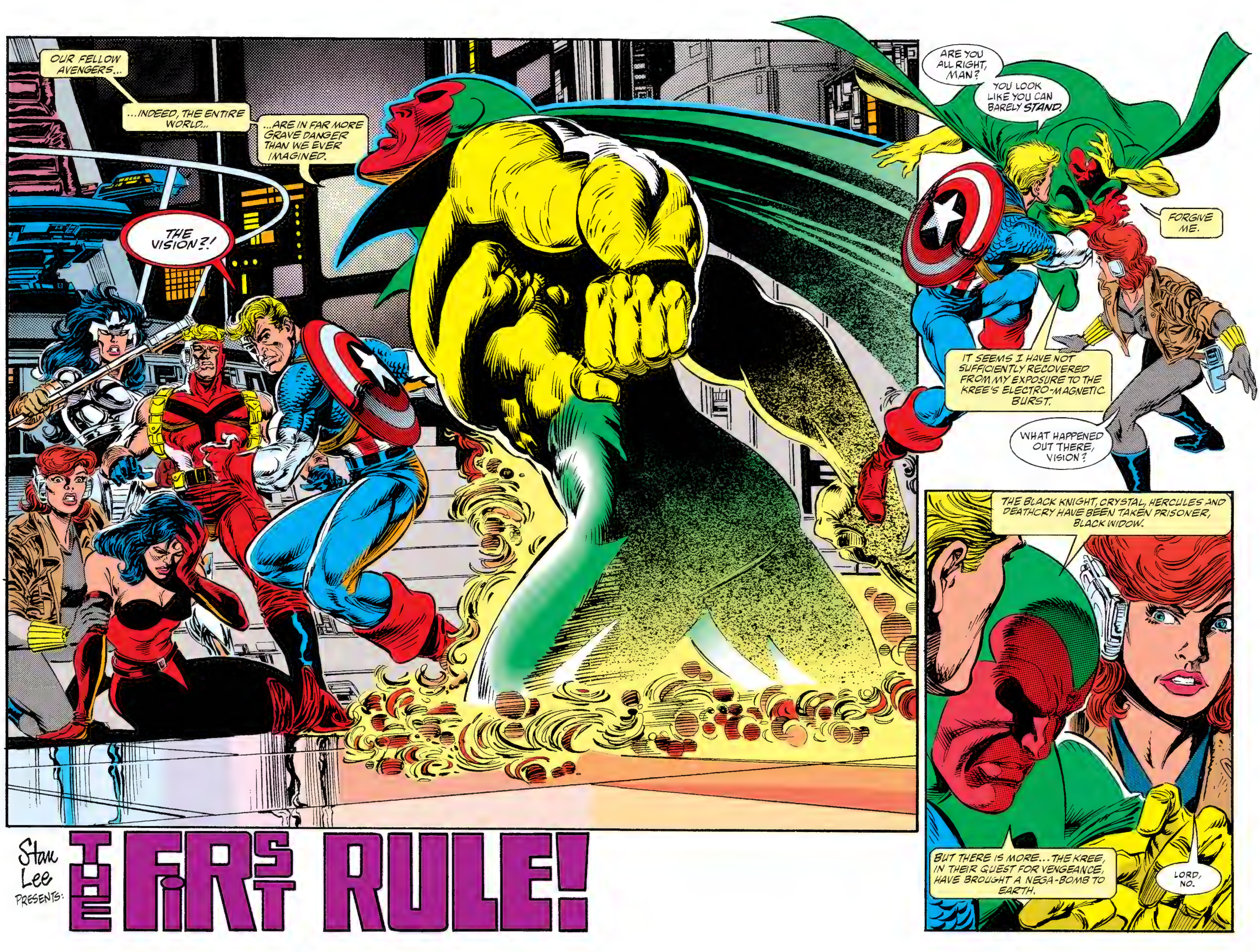
EACH OF MARVEL'S 1993 ANNUALS INTRODUCED AN ALL-NEW CHARACTER
AND WAS POLYBAGGED WITH A COLLECTIBLE TRADING CARD FEATURING THAT CHARACTER.

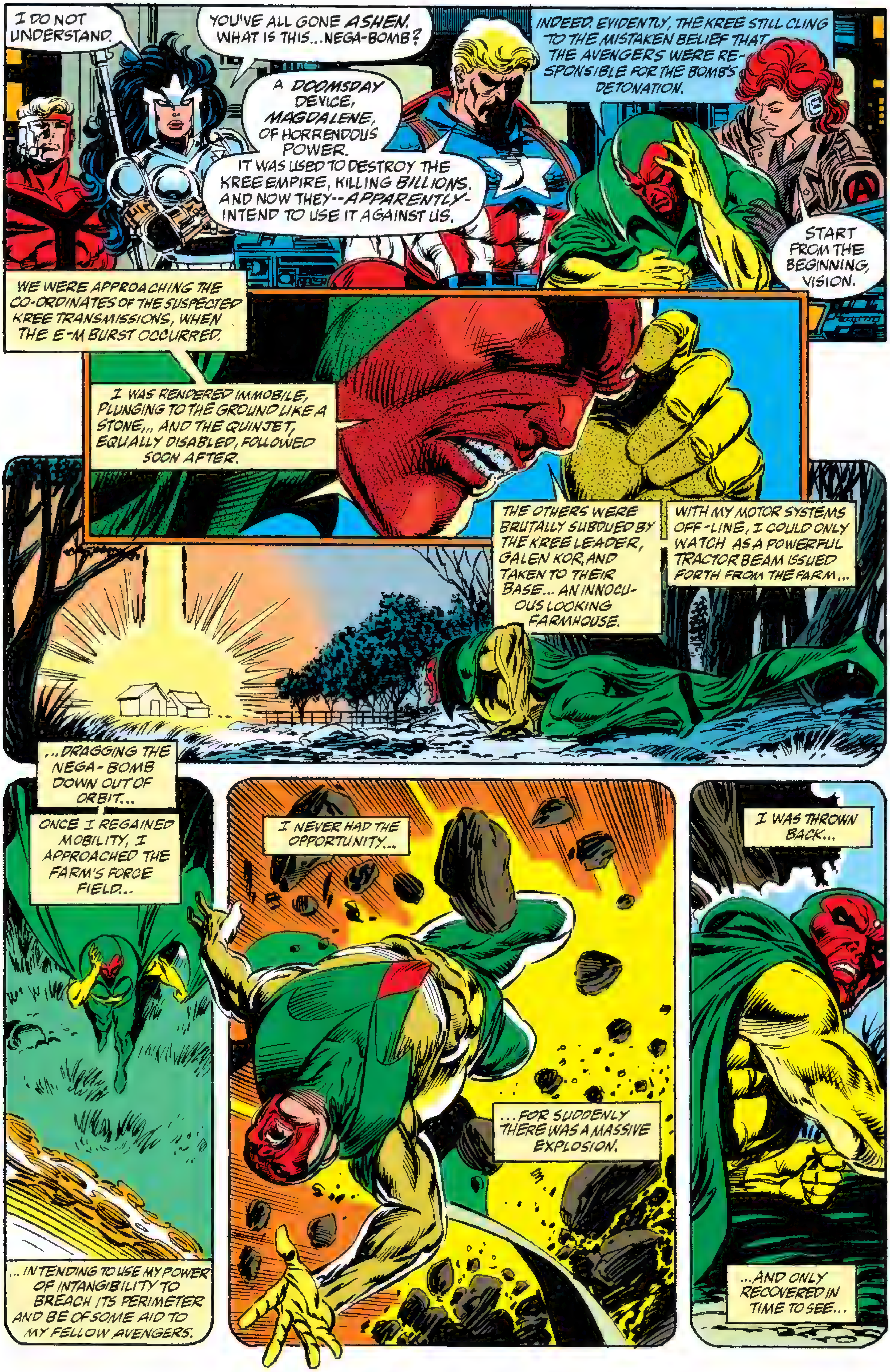
MARVEL COMICS
GIANT-SIZED 30TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE OF THE
AVENGERS
RETRIBUTION

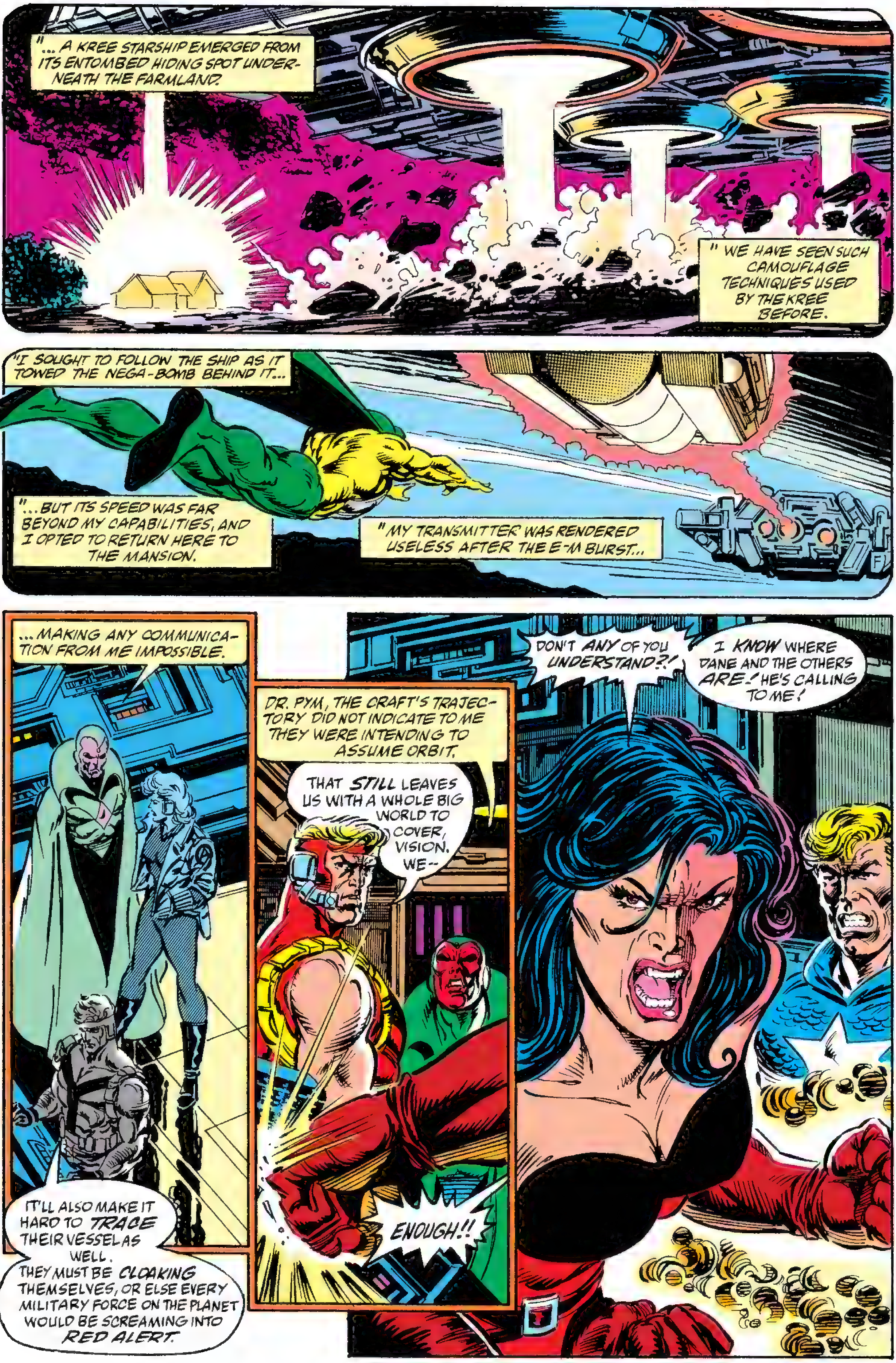
TO COMBAT THOSE THREATS WHICH NO SINGLE HERO CAN STAND AGAINST, EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES HAVE FORGED A COVENANT TO UNITE IN BATTLE FOR THE PROTECTION OF ALL MANKIND!

STAN LEE PRESENTS . . . THE MIGHTY AVENGERS!

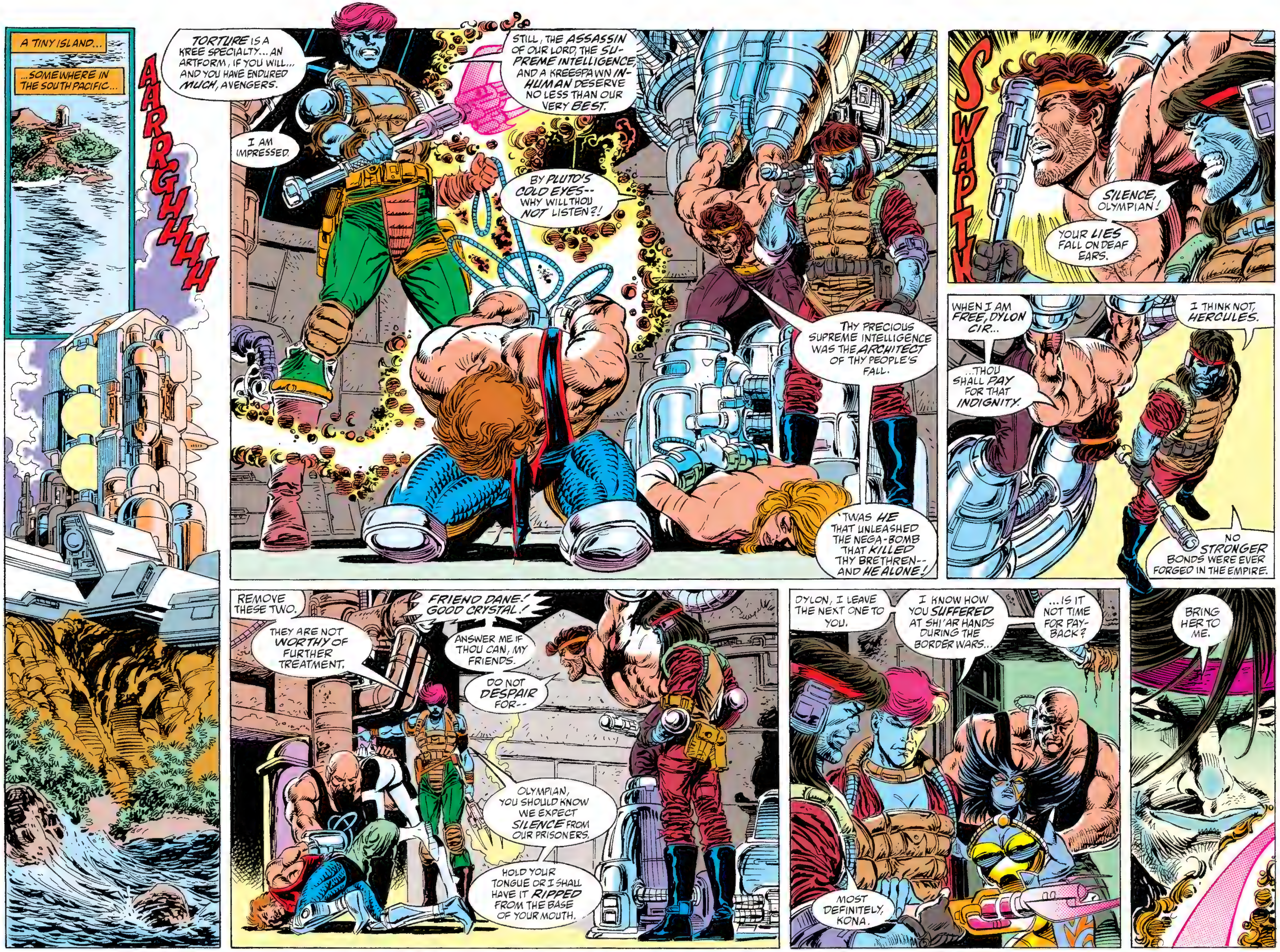

IT'S BEEN *TWENTY* MINUTES...
...SINCE WE LOST CONTACT WITH *DANE'S* RECON TEAM.
AND THERE'S *STILL* NO SIGN OF AN EMERGENCY BEACON?
NOTHING'S SHOWING UP ON THE SCANNERS, *'TASHA.*
WHATEVER HAPPENED, IT HIT THEM *HARD* AND *FAST.*
IT *HAD* TO BE THE KREE, CAP.
THEY MUST HAVE BEEN LAYING A *TRAP* FOR OUR GUYS.
HEAVEN HELP THEM.
BY THE UNI-MIND!
NATASHA, WE'VE GOT TO *STOP* THEM!
OH, SWEET ZURAS, THEY'RE *TORTURING* HIM!
SERSI, WHAT *IS* IT? WHAT'S WRONG?!
IT'S *DANE*... HE'S IN SUCH PAIN, SUCH *AGONY!* DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND?
I FEEL IT... I KNOW!
HANK?
IS THIS POSSIBLE?
WE KNOW *LITTLE* OF THE TELEPATHIC BOND BETWEEN SERSI AND THE *BLACK KNIGHT,* WIDOW... ...EXCEPT THAT IT *EXISTS.*
BUT SHE'S BEEN SO *UNSTABLE* LATELY, I—
NO. SERSI IS CORRECT.

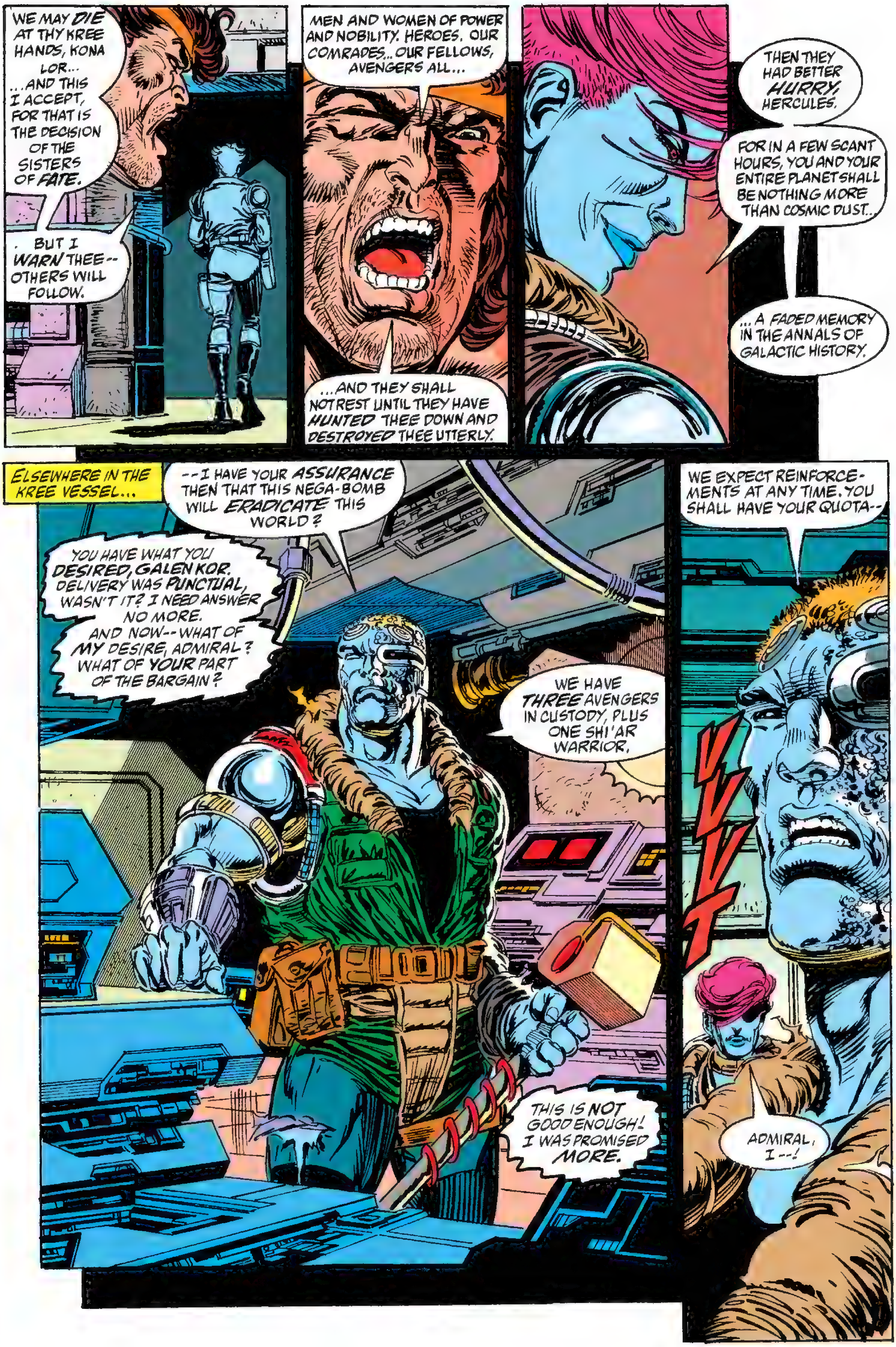

OUR FELLOW AVENGERS...
...INDEED, THE ENTIRE WORLD...
...ARE IN FAR MORE GRAVE DANGER THAN WE EVER IMAGINED.
THE VISION?!
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, MAN?
YOU LOOK LIKE YOU CAN BARELY STAND.
FORGIVE ME.
IT SEEMS I HAVE NOT SUFFICIENTLY RECOVERED FROM MY EXPOSURE TO THE KREE'S ELECTRO-MAGNETIC BURST.
WHAT HAPPENED OUT THERE, VISION?
THE BLACK KNIGHT, CRYSTAL, HERCULES AND DEATHCRY HAVE BEEN TAKEN PRISONER, BLACK WIDOW.
BUT THERE IS MORE... THE KREE, IN THEIR QUEST FOR VENGEANCE, HAVE BROUGHT A NEGA-BOMB TO EARTH.
LORD, NO.
Stan Lee PRESENTS:
THE FIRST RULE!


I DO NOT UNDERSTAND.
YOU'VE ALL GONE ASHEN. WHAT IS THIS...NEGA-BOMB?
A DOOMSDAY DEVICE, MAGDALENE, OF HORRENDOUS POWER.
IT WAS USED TO DESTROY THE KREE EMPIRE, KILLING BILLIONS. AND NOW THEY--APPARENTLY--INTEND TO USE IT AGAINST US.
INDEED. EVIDENTLY, THE KREE STILL CLING TO THE MISTAKEN BELIEF THAT THE AVENGERS WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE BOMB'S DETONATION.
START FROM THE BEGINNING, VISION.
WE WERE APPROACHING THE CO-ORDINATES OF THE SUSPECTED KREE TRANSMISSIONS, WHEN THE E-M BURST OCCURRED.
I WAS RENDERED IMMOBILE, PLUNGING TO THE GROUND LIKE A STONE... AND THE QUINJET, EQUALLY DISABLED, FOLLOWED SOON AFTER.
THE OTHERS WERE BRUTALLY SUBDUED BY THE KREE LEADER, GALEN KOR, AND TAKEN TO THEIR BASE... AN INNOCUOUS LOOKING FARMHOUSE.
WITH MY MOTOR SYSTEMS OFF-LINE, I COULD ONLY WATCH AS A POWERFUL TRACTOR BEAM ISSUED FORTH FROM THE FARM...
...DRAGGING THE NEGA-BOMB DOWN OUT OF ORBIT...
ONCE I REGAINED MOBILITY, I APPROACHED THE FARM'S FORCE FIELD...
...INTENDING TO USE MY POWER OF INTANGIBILITY TO BREACH ITS PERIMETER AND BE OF SOME AID TO MY FELLOW AVENGERS.
I NEVER HAD THE OPPORTUNITY...
...FOR SUDDENLY THERE WAS A MASSIVE EXPLOSION.
I WAS THROWN BACK...
...AND ONLY RECOVERED IN TIME TO SEE...

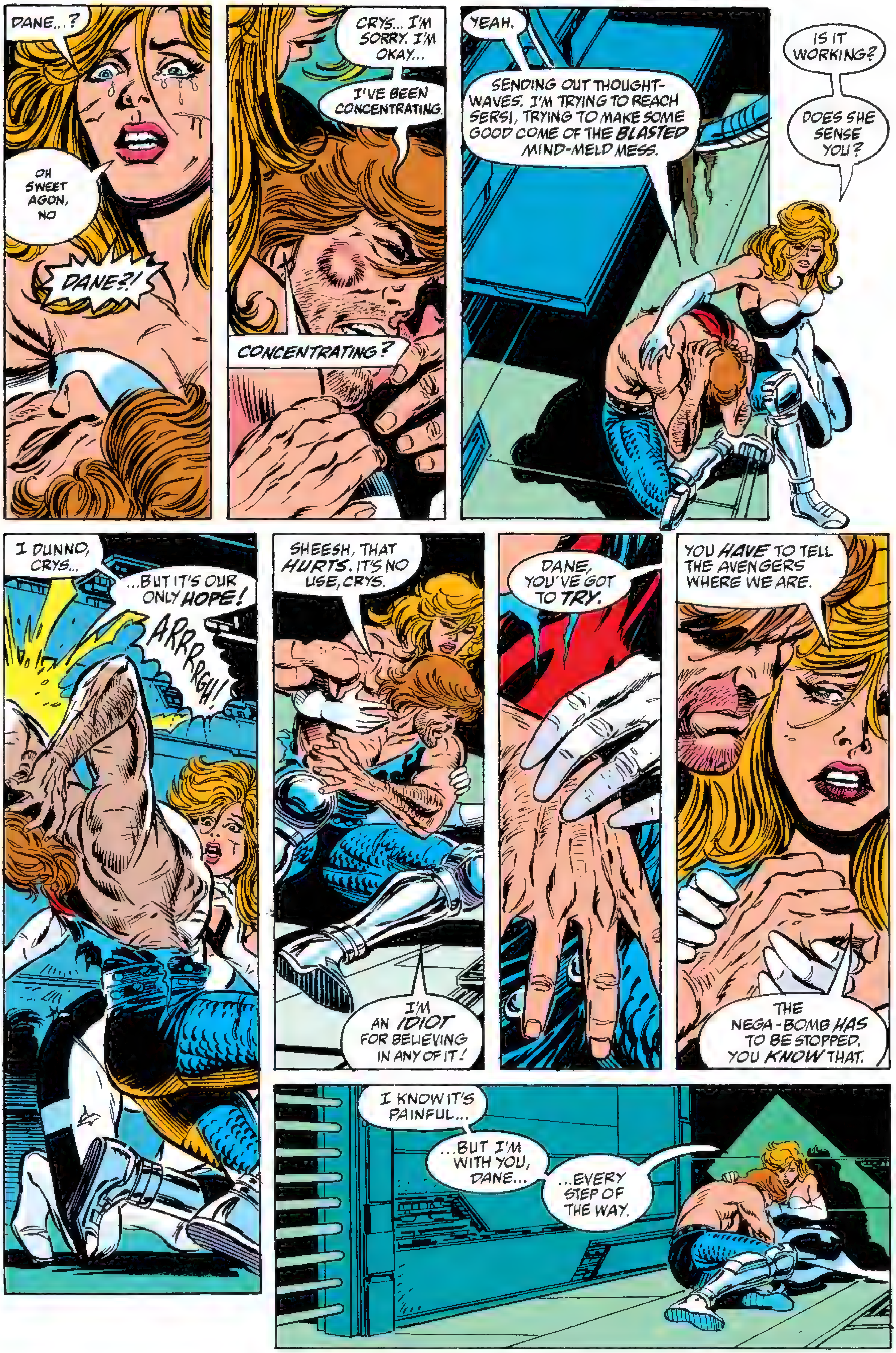

"...A KREE STARSHIP EMERGED FROM ITS ENTOMBED HIDING SPOT UNDERNEATH THE FARMLAND.
"WE HAVE SEEN SUCH CAMOUFLAGE TECHNIQUES USED BY THE KREE BEFORE.
"I SOUGHT TO FOLLOW THE SHIP AS IT TOWED THE NEGA-BOMB BEHIND IT...
"...BUT ITS SPEED WAS FAR BEYOND MY CAPABILITIES, AND I OPTED TO RETURN HERE TO THE MANSION.
"MY TRANSMITTER WAS RENDERED USELESS AFTER THE E-M BURST...
...MAKING ANY COMMUNICATION FROM ME IMPOSSIBLE.
IT'LL ALSO MAKE IT HARD TO TRACE THEIR VESSEL AS WELL.
THEY MUST BE CLOAKING THEMSELVES, OR ELSE EVERY MILITARY FORCE ON THE PLANET WOULD BE SCREAMING INTO RED ALERT.
DR. PYM, THE CRAFT'S TRAJECTORY DID NOT INDICATE TO ME THEY WERE INTENDING TO ASSUME ORBIT.
THAT STILL LEAVES US WITH A WHOLE BIG WORLD TO COVER, VISION. WE--
ENOUGH!!
DON'T ANY OF YOU UNDERSTAND?!
I KNOW WHERE DANE AND THE OTHERS ARE! HE'S CALLING TO ME!

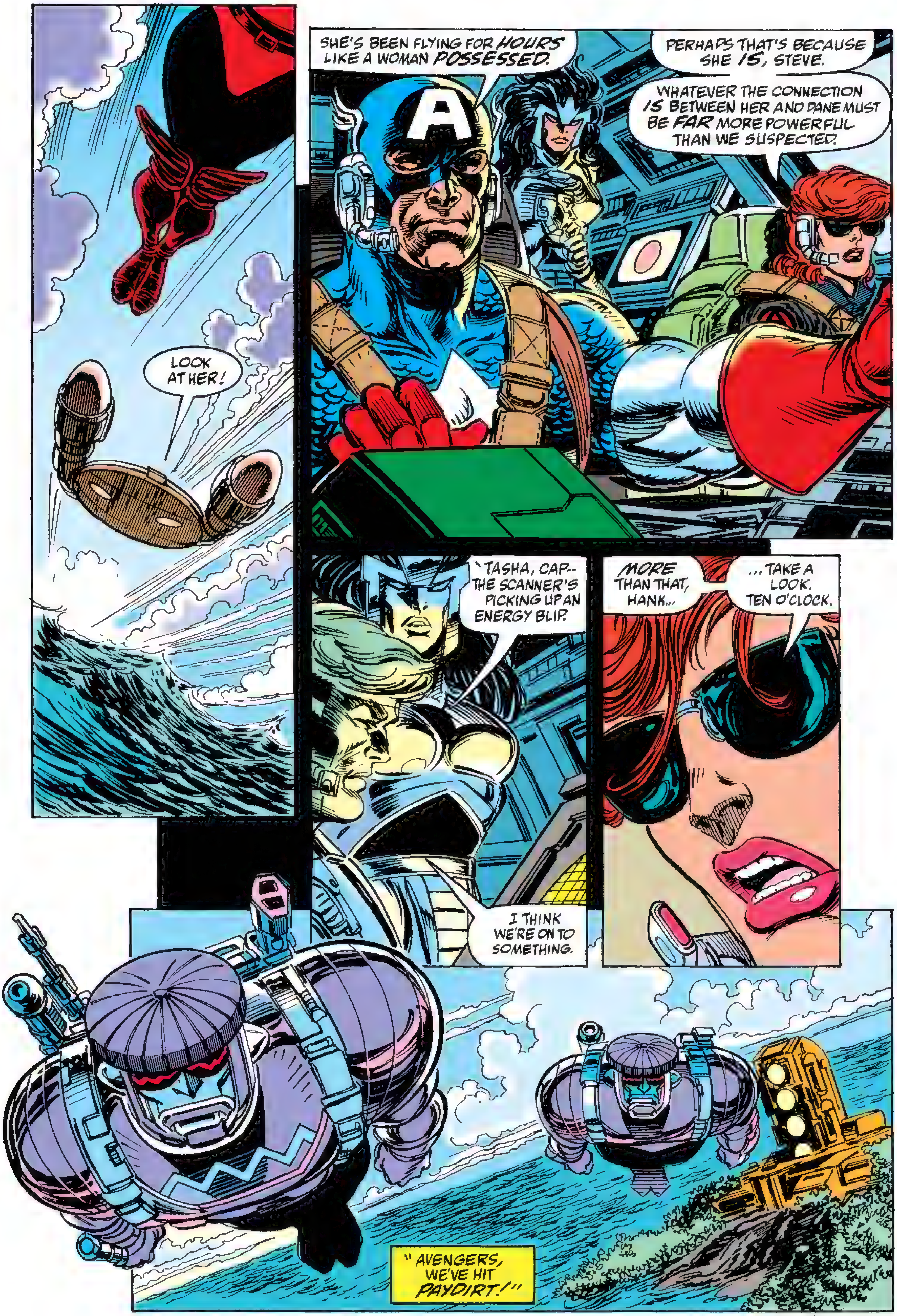
DEBATE ALL YOU WANT--
--BUT I WILL FIND HIM--
--AND MAKE THE KREE PAY!
GREAT!
JUST WHAT WE NEED! A LOOSE CANNON.
RIGHT NOW, SHE'S OUR ONLY HOPE, STEVE.
HANK, WE'RE GOING TO NEED YOUR HELP ON THIS ONE.
THAT'S WHY I'M IN THE UNION SUIT AGAIN, NATASHA.
MAGDALENE, YOU'RE NOT AN AVENGER, BUT--
BUT THIS IS MY WORLD NOW, FOR GOOD OR ILL...
...I AM WITH YOU.
GOOD.
AGREED.
VISION, YOU'RE IN NO SHAPE FOR BATTLE, I'LL NEED YOU HERE CO-ORDINATING ALL OPERATIONS.
THEN LET'S GET THIS SHOW ON THE ROAD--
--AVENGERS ASSEMBLE!

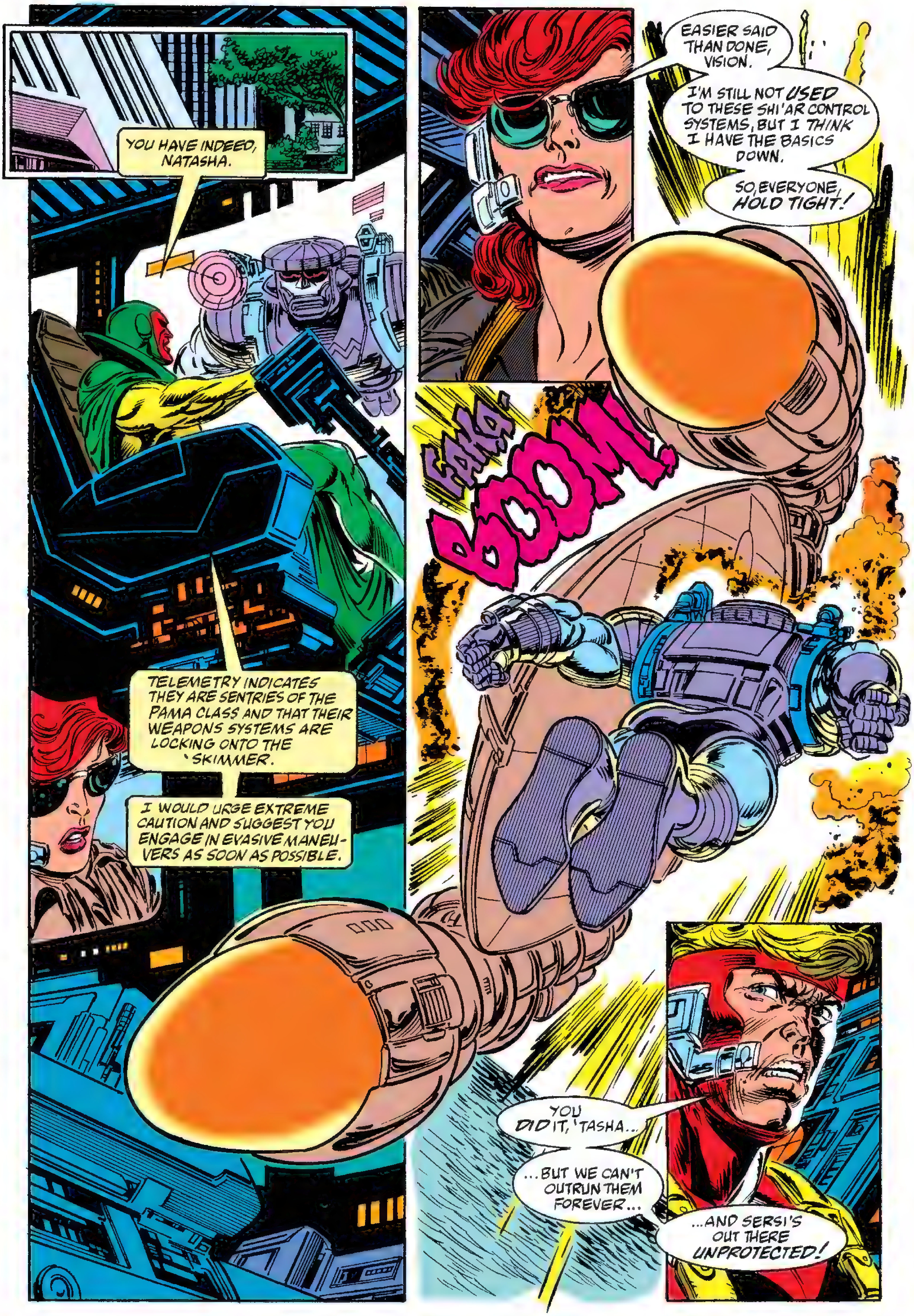

A TINY ISLAND...
...SOMEWHERE IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC...
AARRGHHHH
TORTURE IS A KREE SPECIALTY... AN ARTFORM, IF YOU WILL... AND YOU HAVE ENDURED MUCH, AVENGERS.
STILL, THE ASSASSIN OF OUR LORD, THE SUPREME INTELLIGENCE, AND A KREESPAWN INHUMAN DESERVE NO LESS THAN OUR VERY BEST.
I AM IMPRESSED.
BY PLUTO'S COLD EYES-- WHY WILL THOU NOT LISTEN?!
THY PRECIOUS SUPREME INTELLIGENCE WAS THE ARCHITECT OF THY PEOPLE'S FALL.
'TWAS HE THAT UNLEASHED THE NEGA-BOMB THAT KILLED THY BRETHREN-- AND HE ALONE!
SWAPTK
SILENCE, OLYMPIAN!
YOUR LIES FALL ON DEAF EARS.
WHEN I AM FREE, DYLON CIR...
...THOU SHALL PAY FOR THAT INDIGNITY.
I THINK NOT, HERCULES.
NO STRONGER BONDS WERE EVER FORGED IN THE EMPIRE.
REMOVE THESE TWO.
THEY ARE NOT WORTHY OF FURTHER TREATMENT.
FRIEND DANE! GOOD CRYSTAL!
ANSWER ME IF THOU CAN, MY FRIENDS.
DO NOT DESPAIR FOR--
OLYMPIAN, YOU SHOULD KNOW WE EXPECT SILENCE FROM OUR PRISONERS.
HOLD YOUR TONGUE OR I SHALL HAVE IT RIPPED FROM THE BASE OF YOUR MOUTH.
DYLON, I LEAVE THE NEXT ONE TO YOU.
I KNOW HOW YOU SUFFERED AT SHI'AR HANDS DURING THE BORDER WARS...
...IS IT NOT TIME FOR PAY-BACK?
MOST DEFINITELY, KONA.
BRING HER TO ME.

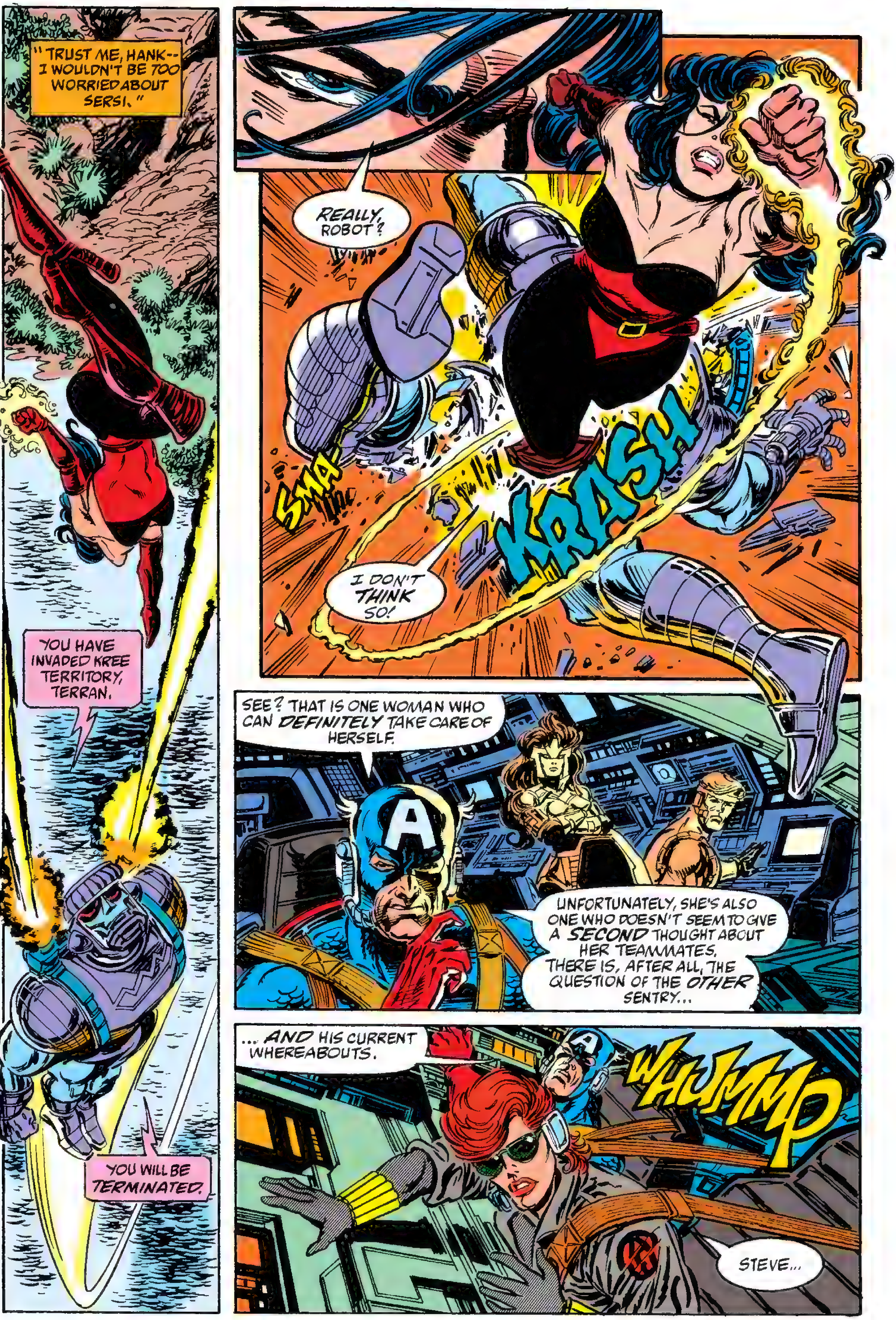

WE MAY DIE AT THY KREE HANDS, KONA LOR... ...AND THIS I ACCEPT, FOR THAT IS THE DECISION OF THE SISTERS OF FATE.
...BUT I WARN THEE--OTHERS WILL FOLLOW.
MEN AND WOMEN OF POWER AND NOBILITY. HEROES. OUR COMRADES...OUR FELLOWS, AVENGERS ALL...
...AND THEY SHALL NOT REST UNTIL THEY HAVE HUNTED THEE DOWN AND DESTROYED THEE UTTERLY.
THEN THEY HAD BETTER HURRY, HERCULES.
FOR IN A FEW SCANT HOURS, YOU AND YOUR ENTIRE PLANET SHALL BE NOTHING MORE THAN COSMIC DUST...
...A FADED MEMORY IN THE ANNALS OF GALACTIC HISTORY.
ELSEWHERE IN THE KREE VESSEL...
--I HAVE YOUR ASSURANCE THEN THAT THIS NEGA-BOMB WILL ERADICATE THIS WORLD?
YOU HAVE WHAT YOU DESIRED, GALEN KOR. DELIVERY WAS PUNCTUAL, WASN'T IT? I NEED ANSWER NO MORE. AND NOW--WHAT OF MY DESIRE, ADMIRAL? WHAT OF YOUR PART OF THE BARGAIN?
WE HAVE THREE AVENGERS IN CUSTODY, PLUS ONE SHI'AR WARRIOR.
THIS IS NOT GOOD ENOUGH! I WAS PROMISED MORE.
WE EXPECT REINFORCEMENTS AT ANY TIME. YOU SHALL HAVE YOUR QUOTA--
VVVT
ADMIRAL, I--!

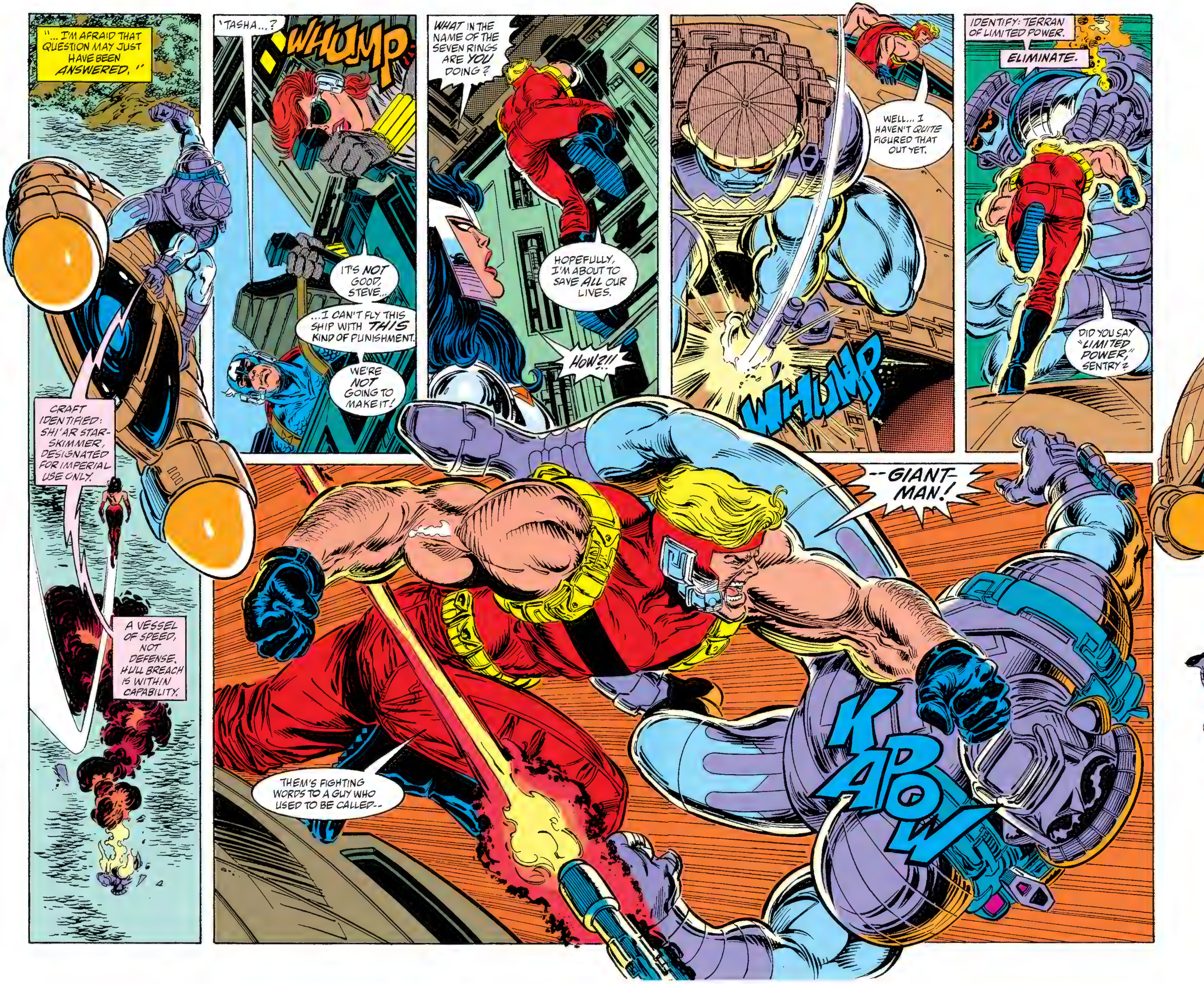
HOW DARE YOU ENTER MY CHAMBERS WITHOUT MY PERMISSION?!
GET OUT!!
WHA--?!
DO NOT PRESUME, GIRL, TO FORGET YOU ARE A SUBORDINATE OFFICER!
GALEN, I ONLY THOUGHT--!
LEAVE!
THE ADMIRAL IS A MOST COMPLEX MAN, IS HE NOT?
TALLAN!
HIS COMM-SCREEN WAS ACTIVATED. WHO COULD HE HAVE BEEN TALKING TO--?
FORGET WHAT YOU SAW, KONA LOR...
...AND STAY OUT OF AFFAIRS YOU CANNOT UNDERSTAND.
THE PRISONER BAY...
DANE...?
IT'S CRYSTAL, DANE...
...ARE YOU ALL RIGHT...?


DANE...?
OH SWEET AGON, NO
DANE?!
CRYS... I'M SORRY. I'M OKAY...
I'VE BEEN CONCENTRATING.
CONCENTRATING?
YEAH.
SENDING OUT THOUGHT-WAVES. I'M TRYING TO REACH SERSI, TRYING TO MAKE SOME GOOD COME OF THE *BLASTED* MIND-MELD MESS.
IS IT WORKING?
DOES SHE SENSE YOU?
I DUNNO, CRYS...
...BUT IT'S OUR ONLY *HOPE!*
ARRRRGH!
SHEESH, THAT *HURTS*. IT'S NO USE, CRYS.
I'M AN *IDIOT* FOR BELIEVING IN ANY OF IT!
DANE, YOU'VE GOT TO *TRY*.
YOU *HAVE* TO TELL THE AVENGERS WHERE WE ARE.
THE NEGA-BOMB *HAS* TO BE STOPPED. YOU *KNOW* THAT.
I KNOW IT'S PAINFUL...
...BUT I'M WITH YOU, DANE...
...EVERY STEP OF THE WAY.


LOOK AT HER!
SHE'S BEEN FLYING FOR HOURS LIKE A WOMAN POSSESSED.
PERHAPS THAT'S BECAUSE SHE IS, STEVE.
WHATEVER THE CONNECTION IS BETWEEN HER AND DANE MUST BE FAR MORE POWERFUL THAN WE SUSPECTED.
'TASHA, CAP-- THE SCANNER'S PICKING UP AN ENERGY BLIP.
I THINK WE'RE ON TO SOMETHING.
MORE THAN THAT, HANK...
...TAKE A LOOK. TEN O'CLOCK.
"AVENGERS, WE'VE HIT PAYDIRT!"

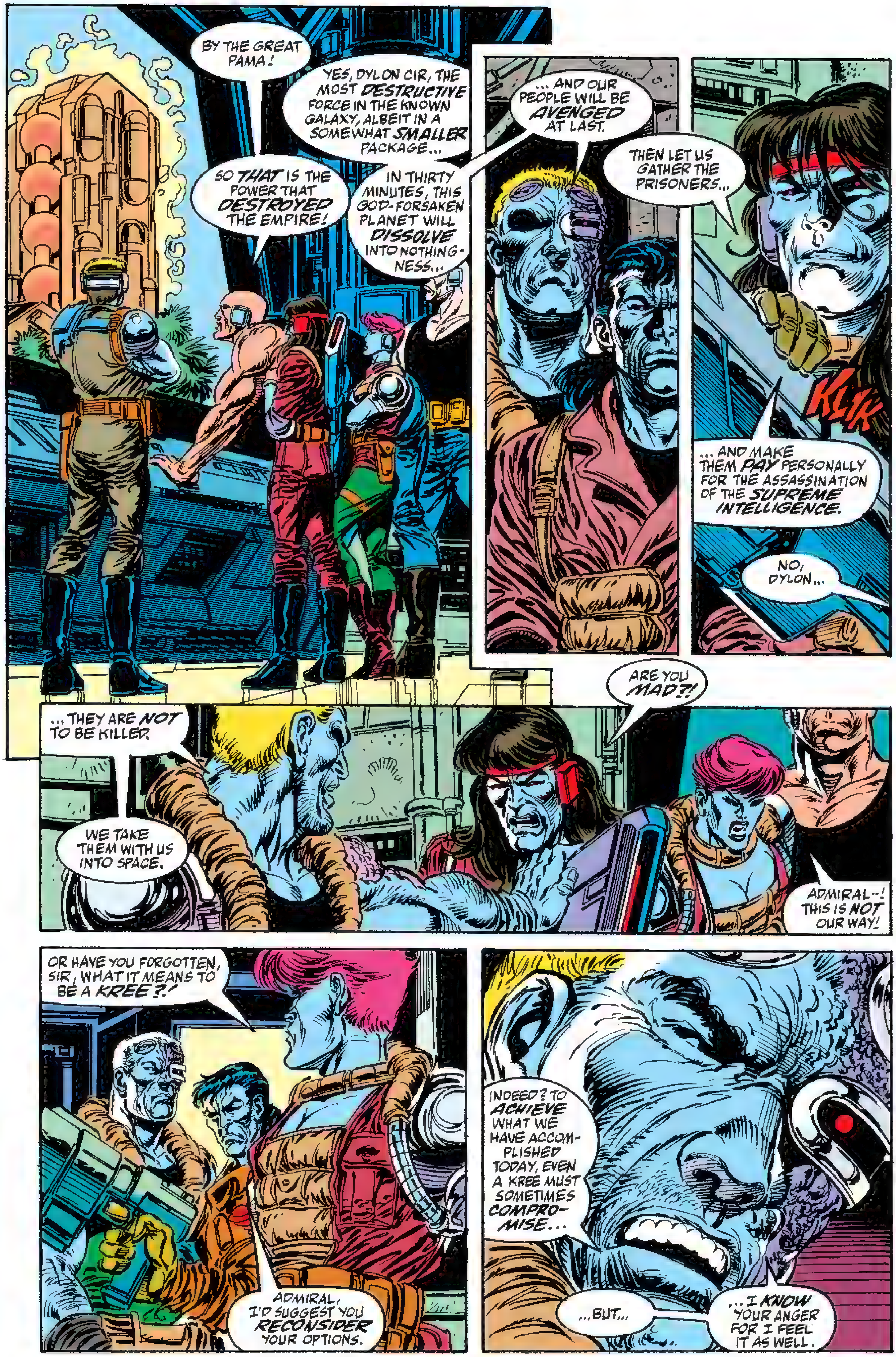

YOU HAVE INDEED, NATASHA.
TELEMETRY INDICATES THEY ARE SENTRIES OF THE PAMA CLASS AND THAT THEIR WEAPONS SYSTEMS ARE LOCKING ONTO THE 'SKIMMER.
I WOULD URGE EXTREME CAUTION AND SUGGEST YOU ENGAGE IN EVASIVE MANEUVERS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.
EASIER SAID THAN DONE, VISION.
I'M STILL NOT USED TO THESE SHI'AR CONTROL SYSTEMS, BUT I THINK I HAVE THE BASICS DOWN.
SO, EVERYONE, HOLD TIGHT!
FAKA BOOM!
YOU DID IT, 'TASHA...
...BUT WE CAN'T OUTRUN THEM FOREVER...
...AND SERSI'S OUT THERE UNPROTECTED!

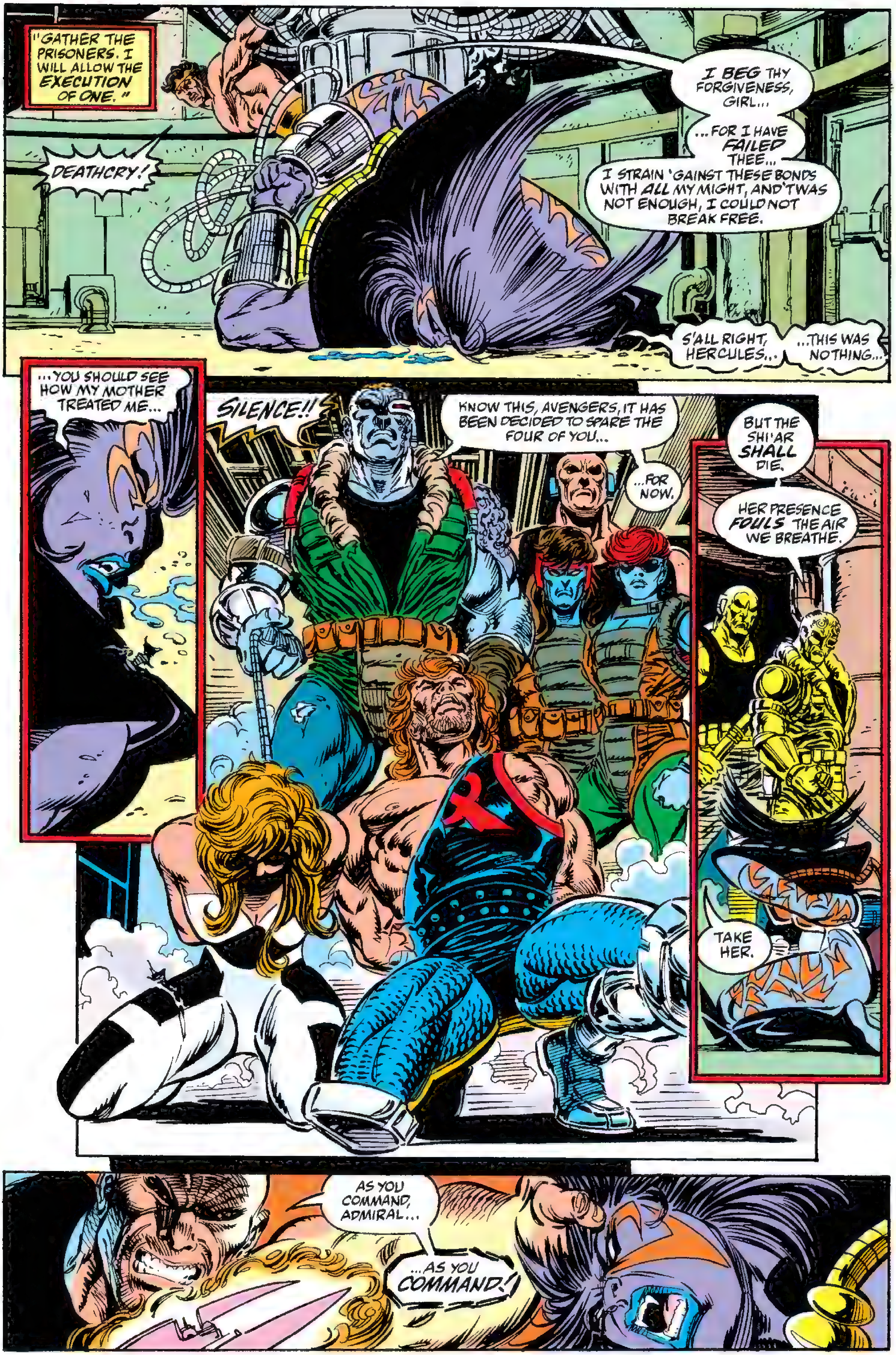

"TRUST ME, HANK-- I WOULDN'T BE *TOO* WORRIED ABOUT SERSI."
YOU HAVE INVADED KREE TERRITORY, TERRAN.
YOU WILL BE *TERMINATED.*
REALLY, ROBOT?
SMA
KRASH
I DON'T THINK SO!
SEE? THAT IS ONE WOMAN WHO CAN *DEFINITELY* TAKE CARE OF HERSELF.
UNFORTUNATELY, SHE'S ALSO ONE WHO DOESN'T SEEM TO GIVE A *SECOND* THOUGHT ABOUT HER TEAMMATES. THERE IS, AFTER ALL, THE QUESTION OF THE *OTHER* SENTRY...
...*AND* HIS CURRENT WHEREABOUTS.
WHUMMP
STEVE...


"...I'M AFRAID THAT QUESTION MAY JUST HAVE BEEN *ANSWERED*,"
CRAFT IDENTIFIED: SHI'AR STAR-SKIMMER, DESIGNATED FOR IMPERIAL USE ONLY.
A VESSEL OF SPEED, NOT DEFENSE. HULL BREACH IS WITHIN CAPABILITY.
'TASHA...?
WHUMP
IT'S *NOT* GOOD, STEVE...
...I CAN'T FLY THIS SHIP WITH *THIS* KIND OF PUNISHMENT.
WE'RE *NOT* GOING TO MAKE IT!
WHAT IN THE NAME OF THE SEVEN RINGS ARE *YOU* DOING?
HOPEFULLY, I'M ABOUT TO SAVE *ALL* OUR LIVES.
HOW?!!
WELL... I HAVEN'T QUITE FIGURED THAT OUT YET.
WHUMP
IDENTIFY: TERRAN OF LIMITED POWER.
ELIMINATE.
DID YOU SAY *"LIMITED POWER,"* SENTRY?
THEM'S FIGHTING WORDS TO A GUY WHO USED TO BE CALLED--
--GIANT-MAN!
KAPOW
GOOD LORD! *HANK!!*

SCRUUMMPPP
THAT WAS *MAGNIFICENT*!
THE ONE CALLED PYM SACRIFICED HIMSELF TO SAVE US *ALL*!
WIDOW, WE'VE GOT TO CHECK THE BEACH...
...IF THERE'S A *CHANCE* HANK SURVIVED...!
I'D BE MORE WORRIED ABOUT THE SENTRY, CAP.
HE PUT UP QUITE A FIGHT-- BUT IT WASN'T QUITE UP TO SNUFF.
HANK! THANK HEAVEN!
YOU KNOW, I'D FORGOTTEN HOW *EXHILARATING* ALL THIS COULD BE!
BUT, HANK-- YOUR HEART...!
CAP...
...WITH THE *FATE* OF THE WORLD IN THE BALANCE...
... MY HEALTH PROBLEMS *PALE* IN SIGNIFICANCE, DON'T YOU THINK?

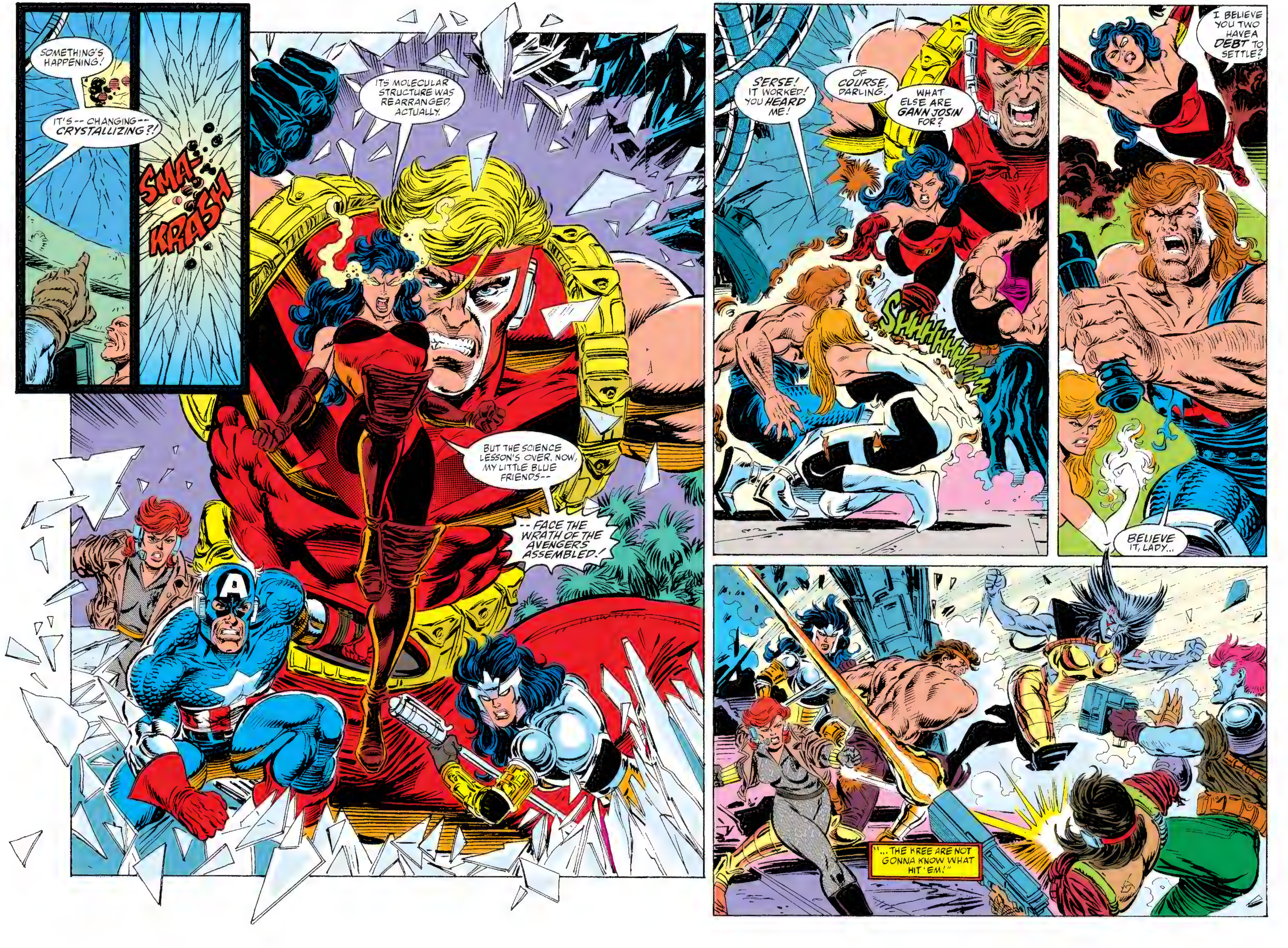
OUR DEAR CAPTAIN IS BEING OVERLY CAUTIOUS, HANK...
...AS USUAL.
SERSI!
I UNDERSTAND YOU'RE GOING THROUGH A LOT LATELY, AVENGER...
...BUT IF YOU EVER ABANDON YOUR TEAM-MATES LIKE THIS AGAIN, I'LL HAVE YOUR HIDE!
YOU'RE RIGHT, OF COURSE, TASHA.
I PROMISE IT WON'T HAPPEN AGAINNNNNN
VOOOOOOOMMMM
GOOD LORD!
WHAT WAS THAT?!
VISION, DID YOU GET A READING...?!
YES. YOU HAVE JUST EXPERIENCED AN ENERGY PULSEWAVE OF NEGATIVELY-CHARGED NEUTRINOS, NATASHA.
IN SHORT, THE NEGA-BOMB HAS BEEN ARMED.
THERE IS NOT MUCH TIME LEFT.

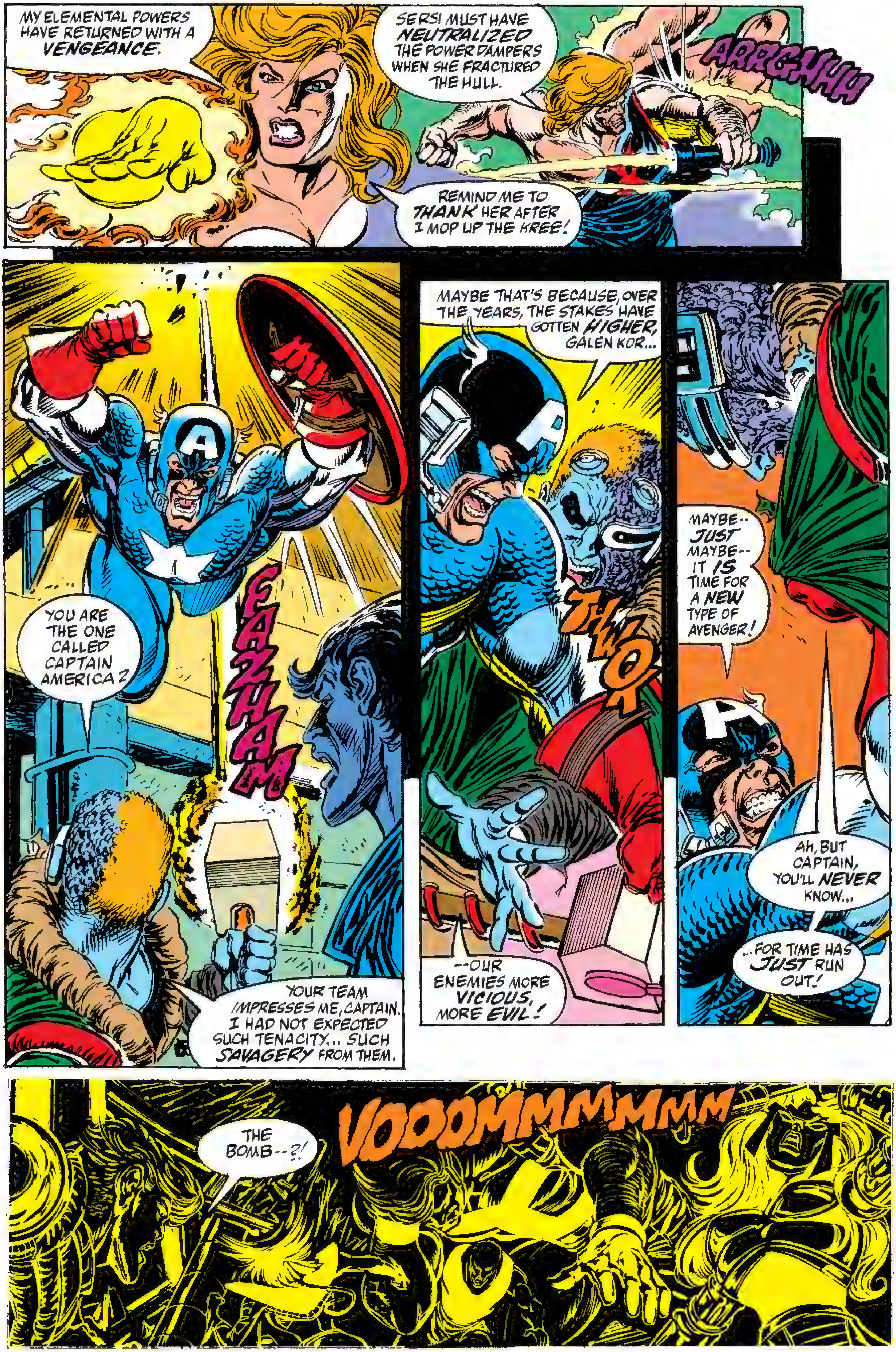

BY THE GREAT PAMA!
YES, DYLON CIR, THE MOST *DESTRUCTIVE* FORCE IN THE KNOWN GALAXY, ALBEIT IN A SOMEWHAT *SMALLER* PACKAGE...
SO *THAT* IS THE POWER THAT *DESTROYED* THE EMPIRE!
IN THIRTY MINUTES, THIS GOD-FORSAKEN PLANET WILL *DISSOLVE* INTO NOTHINGNESS...
...AND OUR PEOPLE WILL BE *AVENGED* AT LAST.
THEN LET US GATHER THE PRISONERS...
KLIK
...AND MAKE THEM *PAY* PERSONALLY FOR THE ASSASSINATION OF THE *SUPREME INTELLIGENCE*.
NO, DYLON...
...THEY ARE *NOT* TO BE KILLED.
WE TAKE THEM WITH US INTO SPACE.
ARE YOU *MAD?!*
ADMIRAL--! THIS IS *NOT* OUR WAY!
OR HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN, SIR, WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A *KREE?!*
ADMIRAL, I'D SUGGEST YOU *RECONSIDER* YOUR OPTIONS.
INDEED? TO *ACHIEVE* WHAT WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED TODAY, EVEN A KREE MUST SOMETIMES *COMPROMISE*...
...BUT...
...I *KNOW* YOUR ANGER FOR I FEEL IT AS WELL.

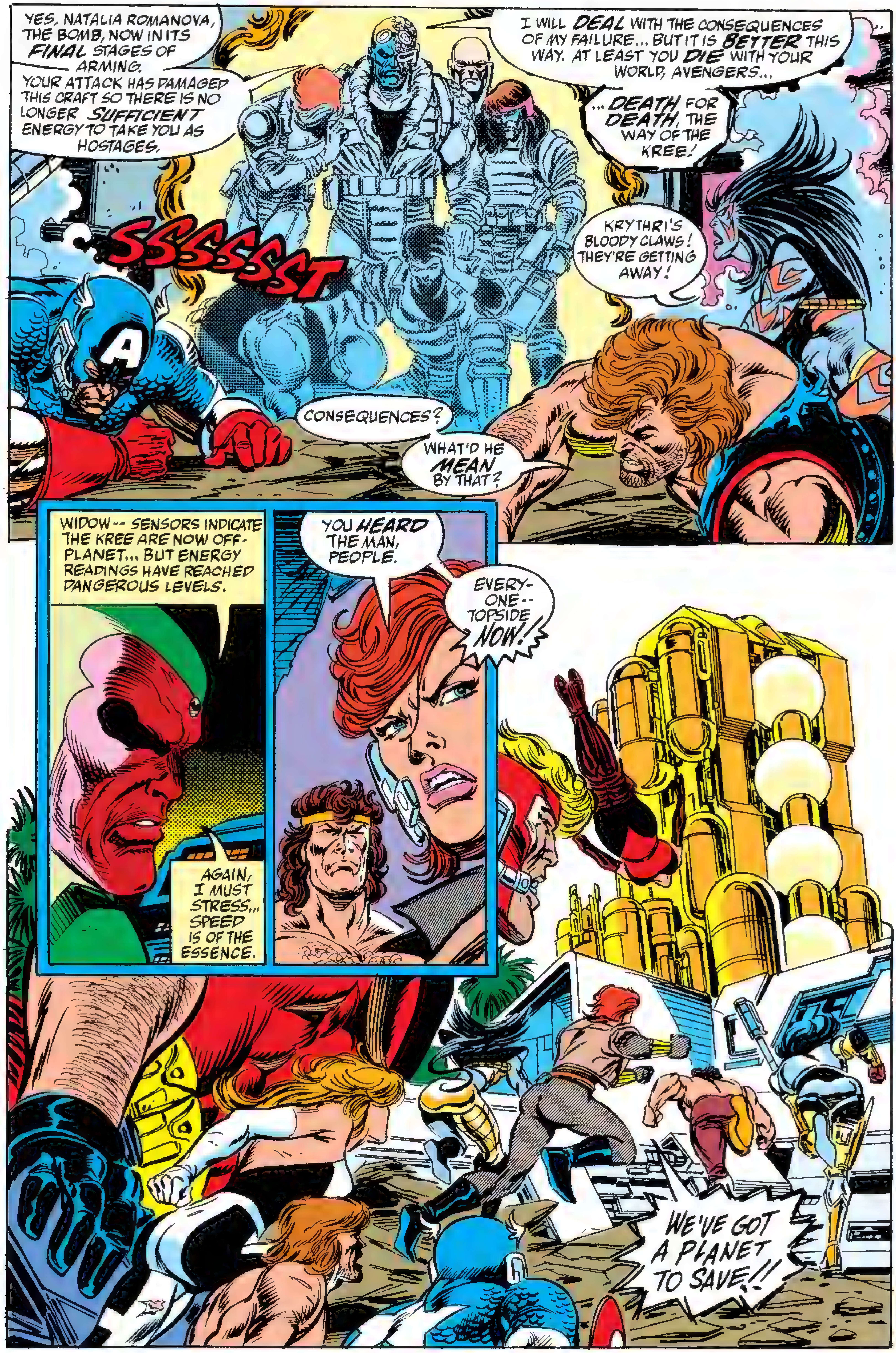

"GATHER THE PRISONERS. I WILL ALLOW THE EXECUTION OF ONE."
DEATHCRY!
I BEG THY FORGIVENESS, GIRL...
...FOR I HAVE FAILED THEE...
I STRAIN 'GAINST THESE BONDS WITH ALL MY MIGHT, AND 'TWAS NOT ENOUGH. I COULD NOT BREAK FREE.
S'ALL RIGHT, HERCULES...
...THIS WAS NOTHING...
...YOU SHOULD SEE HOW MY MOTHER TREATED ME...
SILENCE!!
KNOW THIS, AVENGERS, IT HAS BEEN DECIDED TO SPARE THE FOUR OF YOU...
...FOR NOW.
BUT THE SHI'AR SHALL DIE.
HER PRESENCE FOULS THE AIR WE BREATHE.
TAKE HER.
AS YOU COMMAND, ADMIRAL...
...AS YOU COMMAND!

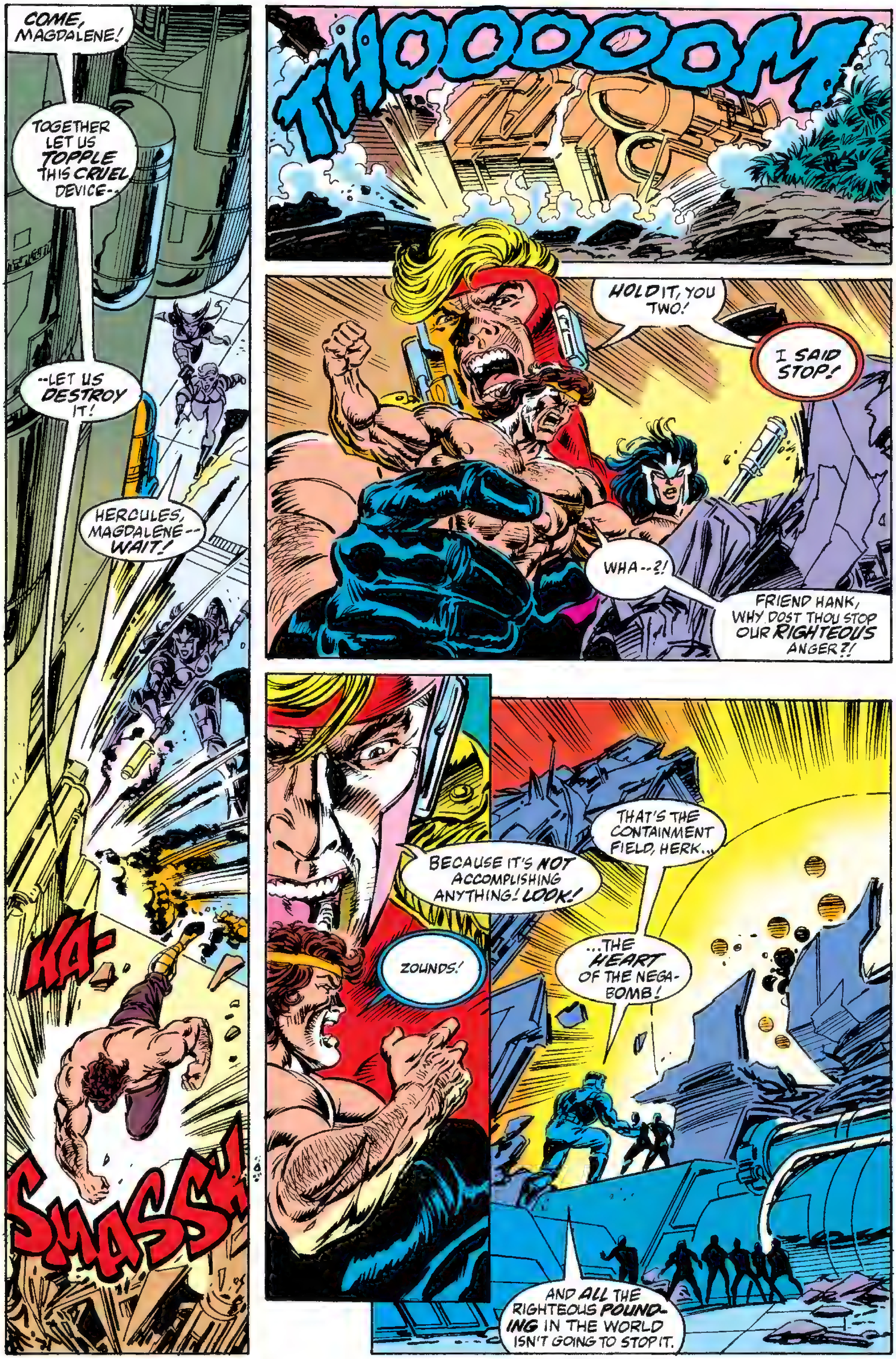
AIEEEEEEEEEE
OH LORD
I CAN'T WATCH!
I SAY THEE NOW, GALEN KOR--
--ENOUGH!!
BY LOST HALA--IT IS NOT POSSIBLE!
WHEN THOU HAST LIVED AS LONG AS I HAVE, KREEMAN...
...THOU SHALL LEARN-- ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE!
SNAP
SNAP
SNAP
WELL DONE, AVENGER!
BUT I FEAR THIS FAT KREE SHALL NOT LIVE LONG ENOUGH TO LEARN A VALUABLE LESSON--

-- FOR HE SHALL PAY FOR WHAT HE DID.
SO SWEARS DEATHCRY!
SLASHKTTT
ARGGHH
KILL THEM BOTH!
FASHASMMMM
THY FOOLISH WEAPONS WILL NOT SAVE THEE FROM THE PRINCE OF POWER!
I SHALL TEAR THIS SHIP DOWN AROUND THEE!
RRRIIIIPP
WHAT'S GOING ON?! THE SHIP IS SHAKING?!
LOOK! AT THE HULL!

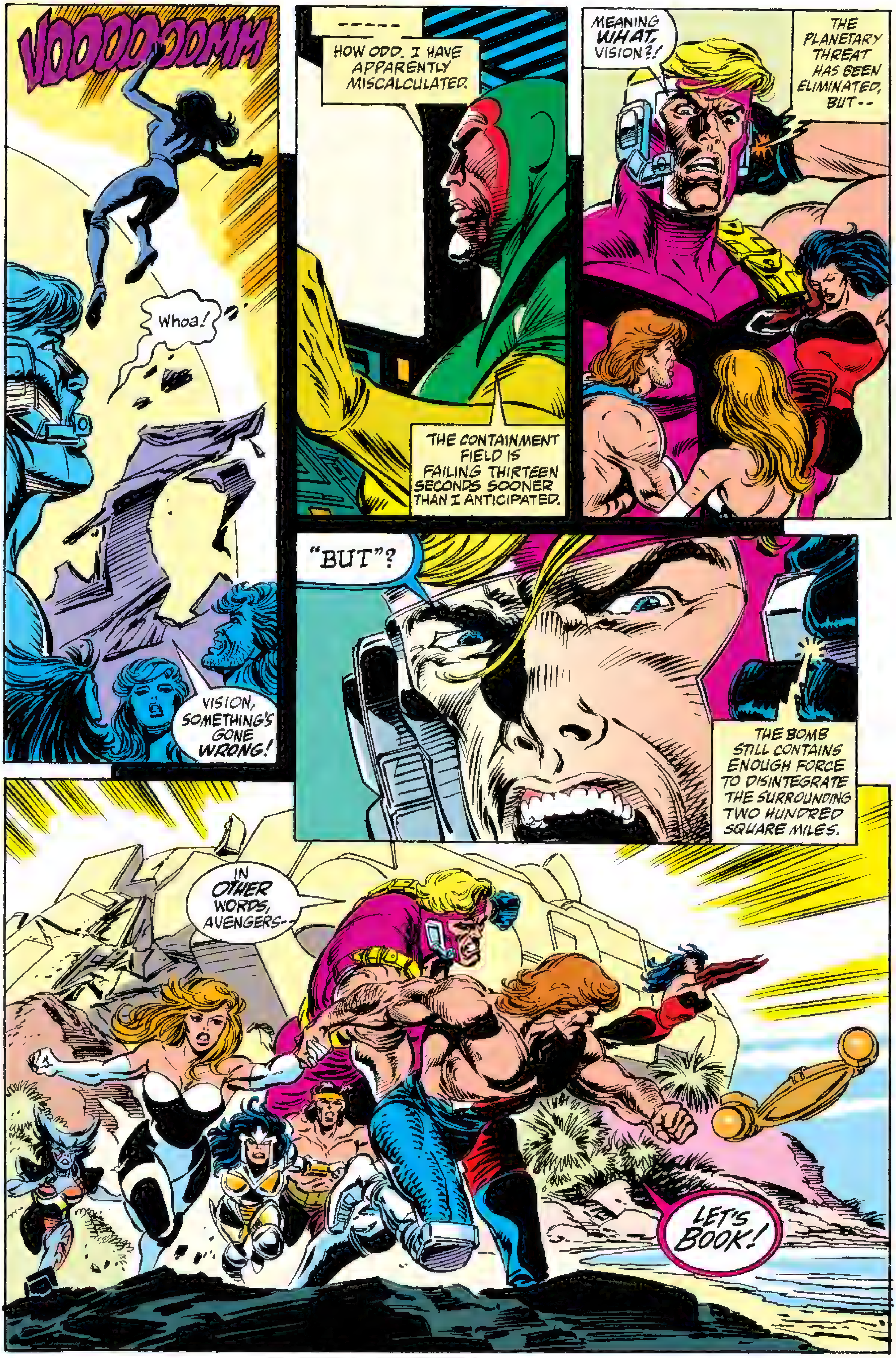

SOMETHING'S HAPPENING!
IT'S -- CHANGING -- CRYSTALLIZING?!
SMA-KRASH
ITS MOLECULAR STRUCTURE WAS REARRANGED, ACTUALLY.
BUT THE SCIENCE LESSON'S OVER. NOW, MY LITTLE BLUE FRIENDS--
--FACE THE WRATH OF THE AVENGERS ASSEMBLED!
SERSE! IT WORKED! YOU HEARD ME!
OF COURSE, DARLING. WHAT ELSE ARE GANN JOSIN FOR?
SHHHHHHHHZZM
I BELIEVE YOU TWO HAVE A DEBT TO SETTLE?
BELIEVE IT, LADY...
"...THE KREE ARE NOT GONNA KNOW WHAT HIT 'EM!"


MY ELEMENTAL POWERS HAVE RETURNED WITH A VENGEANCE.
SERSI MUST HAVE NEUTRALIZED THE POWER DAMPERS WHEN SHE FRACTURED THE HULL.
ARRGHHH
REMIND ME TO THANK HER AFTER I MOP UP THE KREE!
YOU ARE THE ONE CALLED CAPTAIN AMERICA?
FAZHAM
YOUR TEAM IMPRESSES ME, CAPTAIN. I HAD NOT EXPECTED SUCH TENACITY... SUCH SAVAGERY FROM THEM.
MAYBE THAT'S BECAUSE, OVER THE YEARS, THE STAKES HAVE GOTTEN HIGHER, GALEN KOR...
THWOK
--OUR ENEMIES MORE VICIOUS, MORE EVIL!
MAYBE-- JUST MAYBE-- IT IS TIME FOR A NEW TYPE OF AVENGER!
Ah, BUT CAPTAIN, YOU'LL NEVER KNOW...
...FOR TIME HAS JUST RUN OUT!
THE BOMB--?!
VOOOMMMMMMM

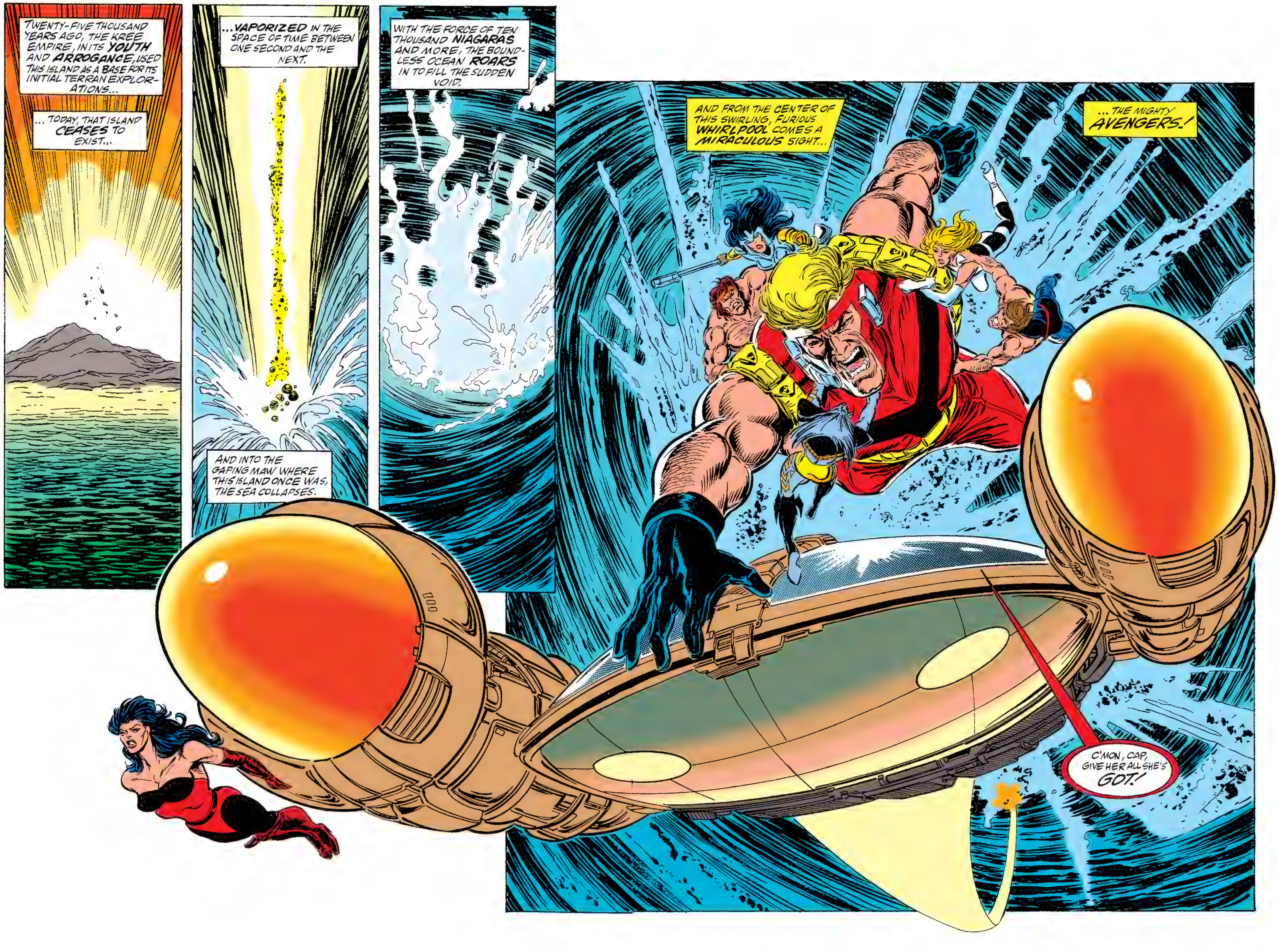

YES, NATALIA ROMANOVA, THE BOMB, NOW IN ITS *FINAL* STAGES OF ARMING.
YOUR ATTACK HAS DAMAGED THIS CRAFT SO THERE IS NO LONGER *SUFFICIENT* ENERGY TO TAKE YOU AS HOSTAGES.
I WILL *DEAL* WITH THE CONSEQUENCES OF MY FAILURE... BUT IT IS *BETTER* THIS WAY. AT LEAST YOU *DIE* WITH YOUR WORLD, AVENGERS...
...*DEATH* FOR *DEATH*, THE WAY OF THE KREE!
SSSSSST
KRYTHRI'S BLOODY CLAWS! THEY'RE GETTING AWAY!
CONSEQUENCES?
WHAT'D HE *MEAN* BY THAT?
WIDOW -- SENSORS INDICATE THE KREE ARE NOW OFF-PLANET... BUT ENERGY READINGS HAVE REACHED DANGEROUS LEVELS.
AGAIN, I MUST STRESS... SPEED IS OF THE ESSENCE.
YOU *HEARD* THE MAN, PEOPLE.
EVERY-ONE -- TOPSIDE *NOW!*
WE'VE GOT A PLANET TO SAVE!!

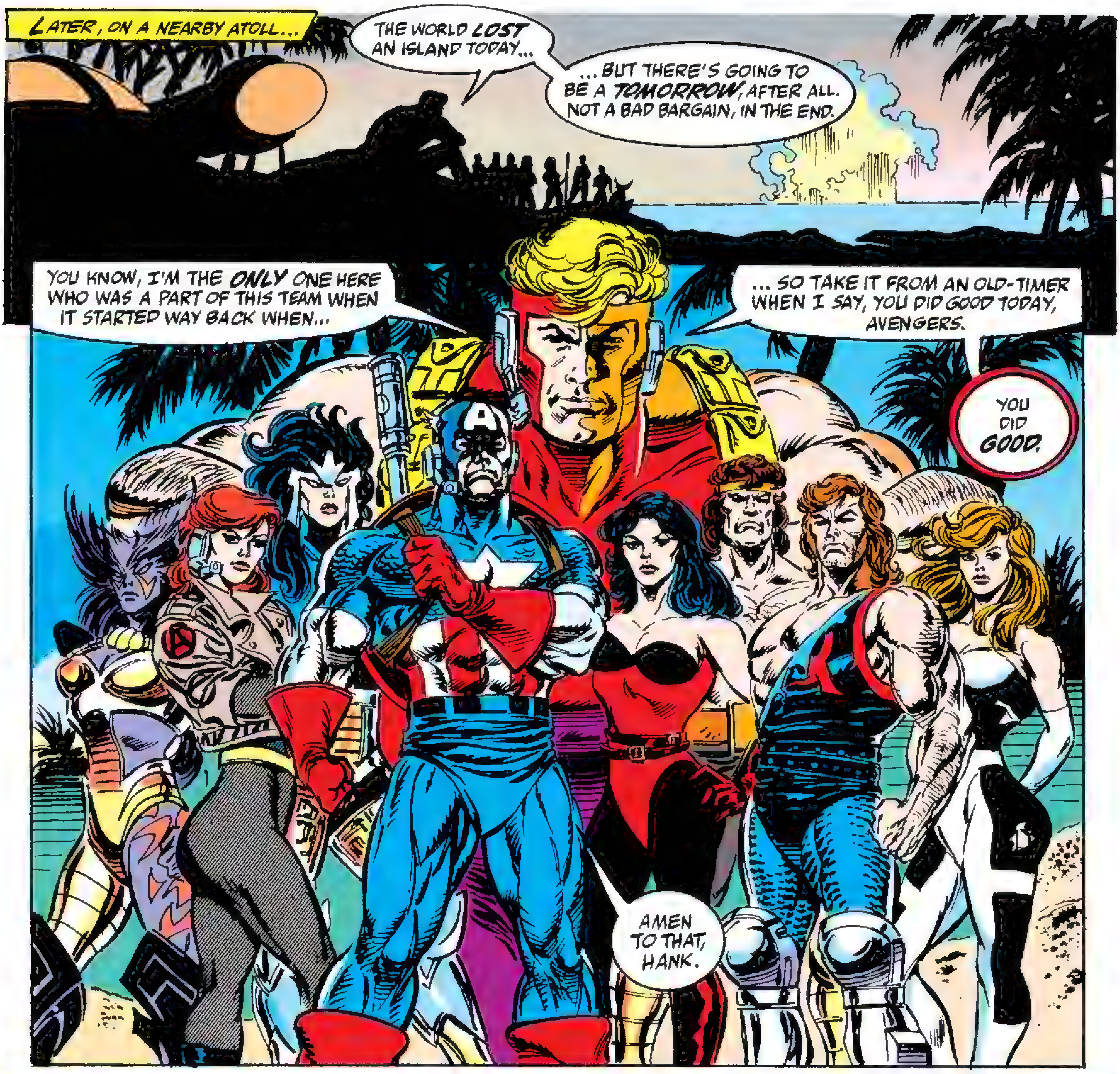

COME, MAGDALENE!
TOGETHER LET US TOPPLE THIS CRUEL DEVICE--
--LET US DESTROY IT!
HERCULES, MAGDALENE-- WAIT!
KA-
SMASSH!
THOOOOOM!
HOLD IT, YOU TWO!
I SAID STOP!
WHA--?!
FRIEND HANK, WHY DOST THOU STOP OUR RIGHTEOUS ANGER?!
BECAUSE IT'S NOT ACCOMPLISHING ANYTHING! LOOK!
ZOUNDS!
THAT'S THE CONTAINMENT FIELD, HERK...
...THE HEART OF THE NEGA-BOMB!
AND ALL THE RIGHTEOUS POUNDING IN THE WORLD ISN'T GOING TO STOP IT.

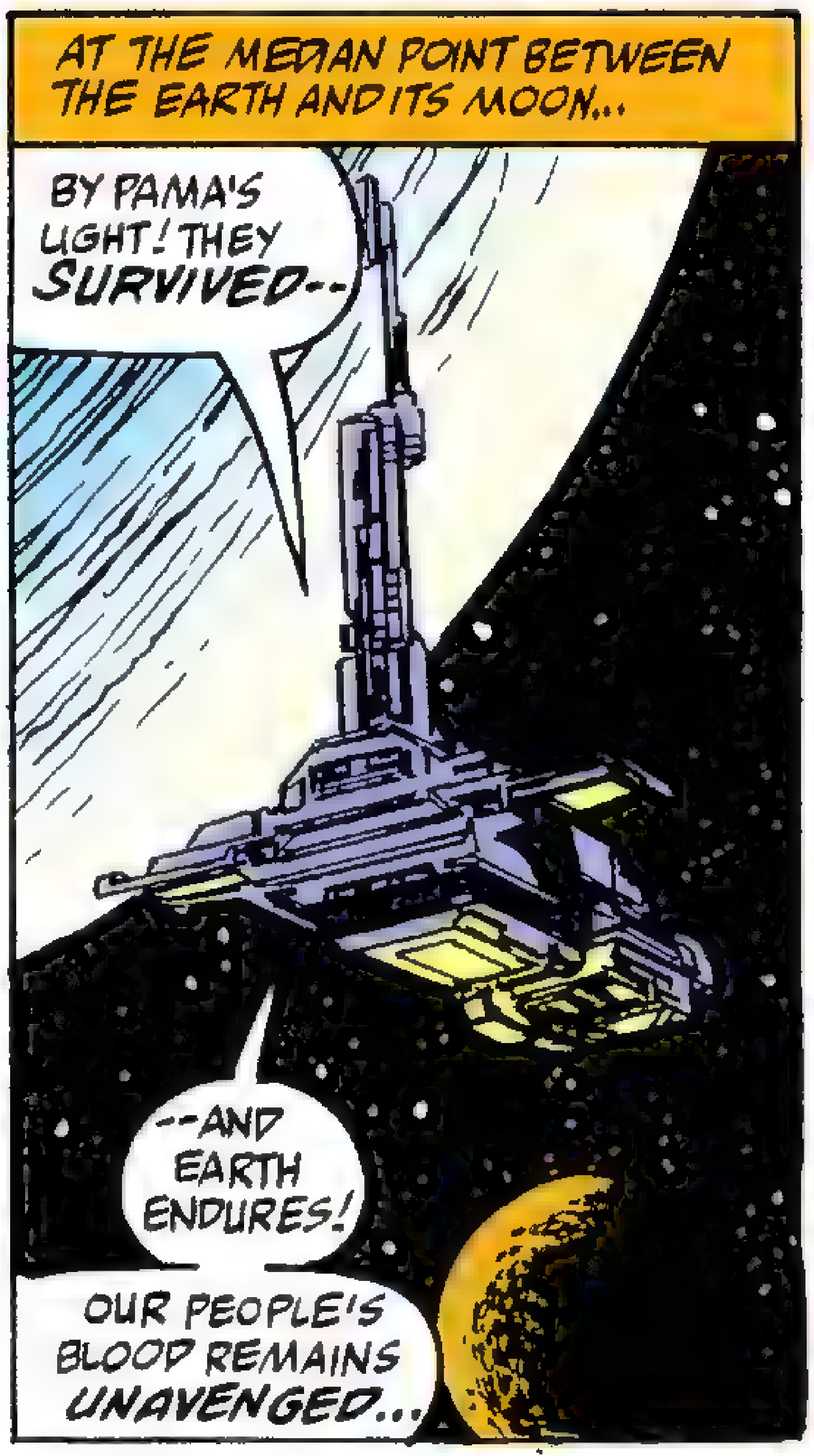
DR. PYM IS CORRECT. THE CONTAINMENT FIELD IS ALL THAT SEPARATES US FROM ARMAGEDDON AND IT IS WEAKENING BY THE SECOND.
OUR ONLY CHANCE IS TO RID THE NEGA-BOMB OF EXPLOSIVE POWER BY MOLECULARLY CHANGING THE COMPOSITION OF ITS NEGATIVE IONS. ONLY ONE AVENGER IS CAPABLE OF ACCOMPLISHING SUCH A FEAT.
ARE YOU UP TO IT, SERSI?
IT SEEMS I HAVE TO BE, DOESN'T IT?
VISION, ARE YOU SURE THERE'S NO OTHER WAY...?
DON'T WORRY, CAPTAIN. I WON'T FAIL YOU AGAIN...
I PROMISE.
COME ON, STEVE. LET'S GET THE SKIMMER. ..I'VE A HUNCH WE'RE GOING TO NEED A QUICK GETAWAY.
VISION, I'M GOING TO NEED YOU TO GUIDE ME.
REARRANGING SUB-ATOMIC PARTICLES IS NOT AS EASY AS PEOPLE WOULD HAVE YOU BELIEVE.
YOUR ATTEMPT AT HUMOR IS NOTED, SERSI...
...BUT YOU ARE DOING ADEQUATELY. ENERGY READINGS ARE DROPPING SUBSTANTIALLY.
IN 27 SECONDS, THE BOMB WILL BE RENDERED INACTIVE. THE DANGER IS PASSING.
DON'T GET SLOPPY ON ME, VISION...
...A LOT CAN HAPPEN IN 27 SECONDS.
DANE--?
DO IT, SERSE... I'M WITH YOU... DON'T LOSE CONTROL... DON'T!

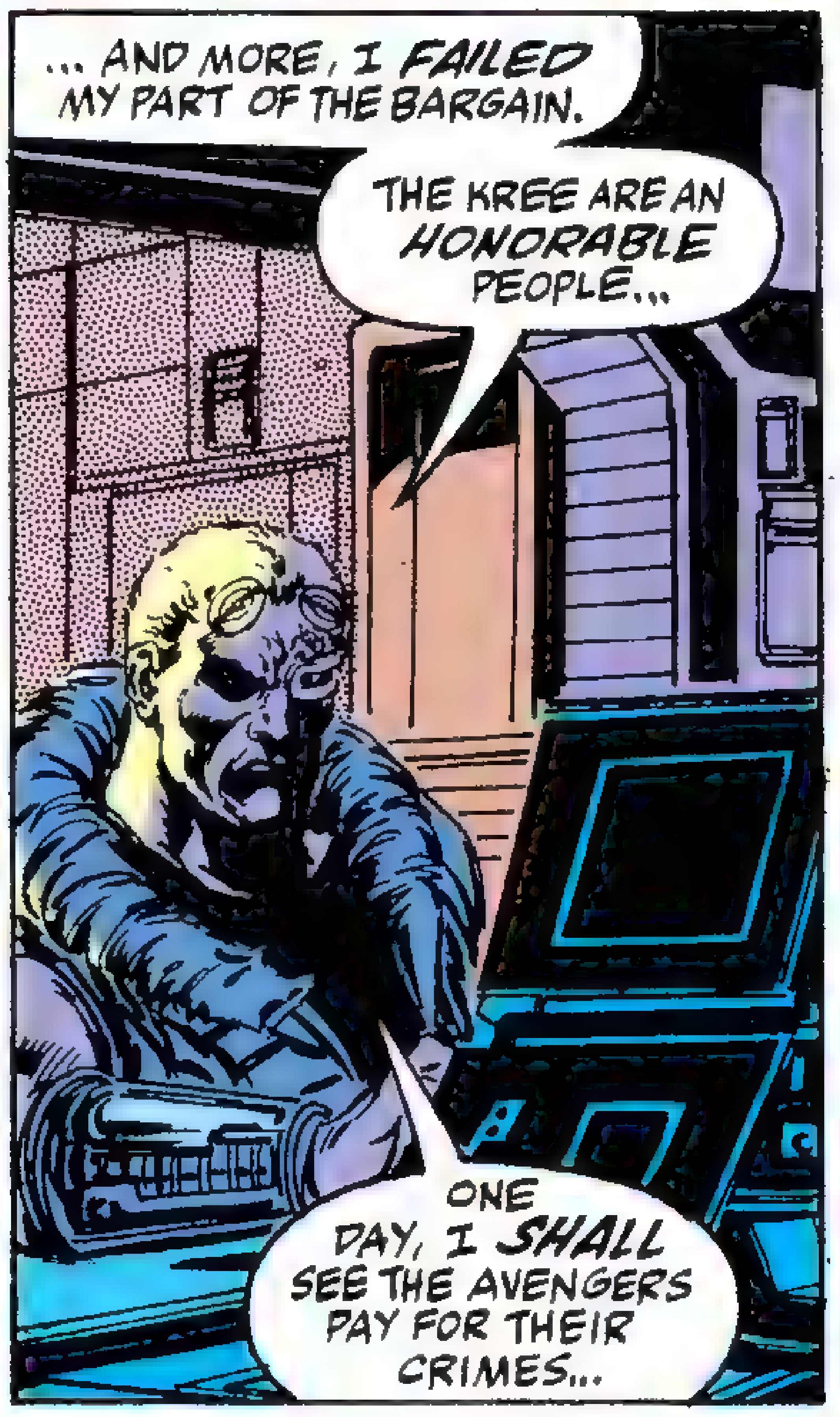

VOOOOOOMM
Whoa!
VISION, SOMETHING'S GONE WRONG!

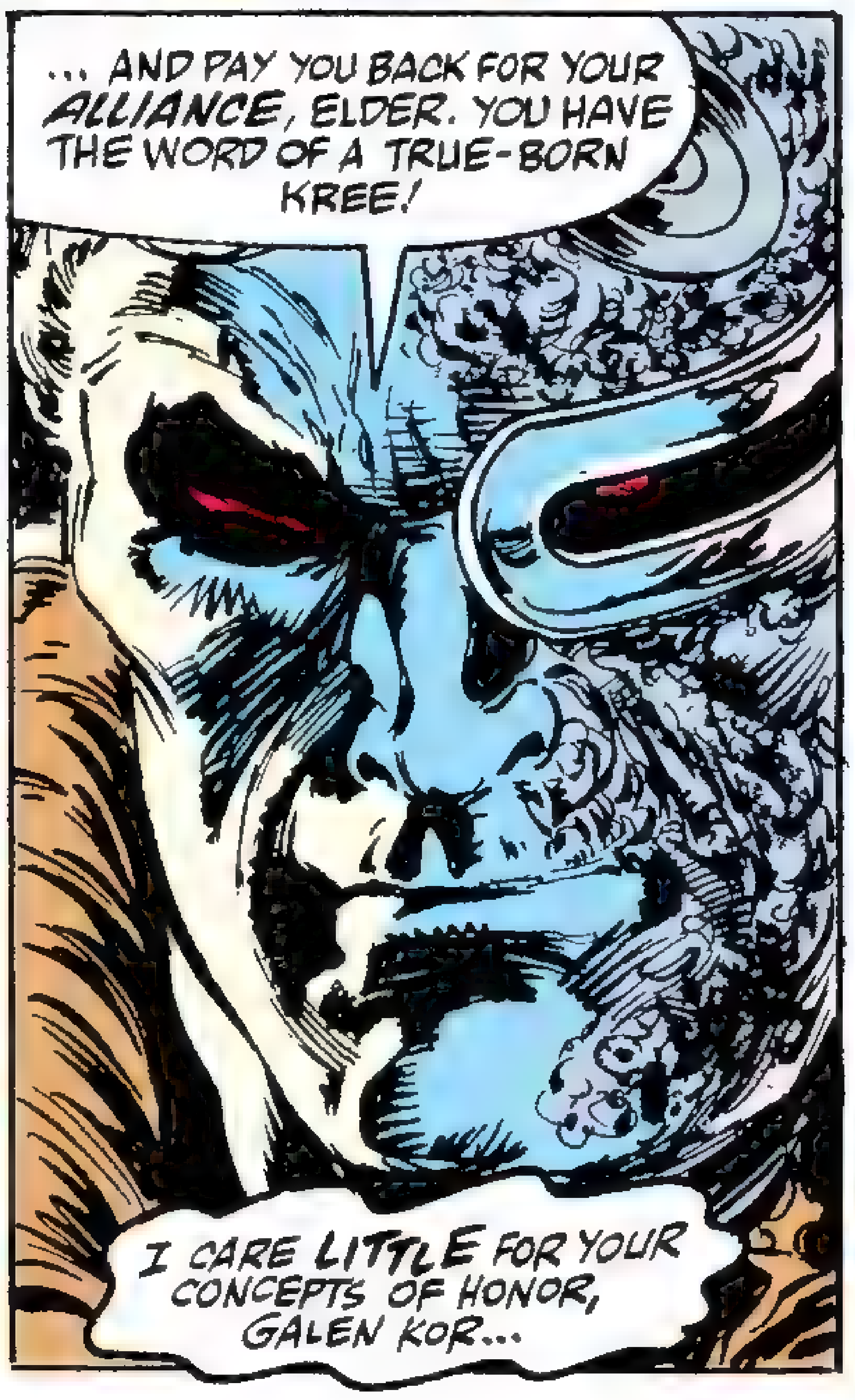
HOW ODD. I HAVE APPARENTLY MISCALCULATED.
THE CONTAINMENT FIELD IS FAILING THIRTEEN SECONDS SOONER THAN I ANTICIPATED.
MEANING WHAT, VISION?!
THE PLANETARY THREAT HAS BEEN ELIMINATED, BUT--
"BUT"?
THE BOMB STILL CONTAINS ENOUGH FORCE TO DISINTEGRATE THE SURROUNDING TWO HUNDRED SQUARE MILES.
IN OTHER WORDS, AVENGERS--
LET'S BOOK!

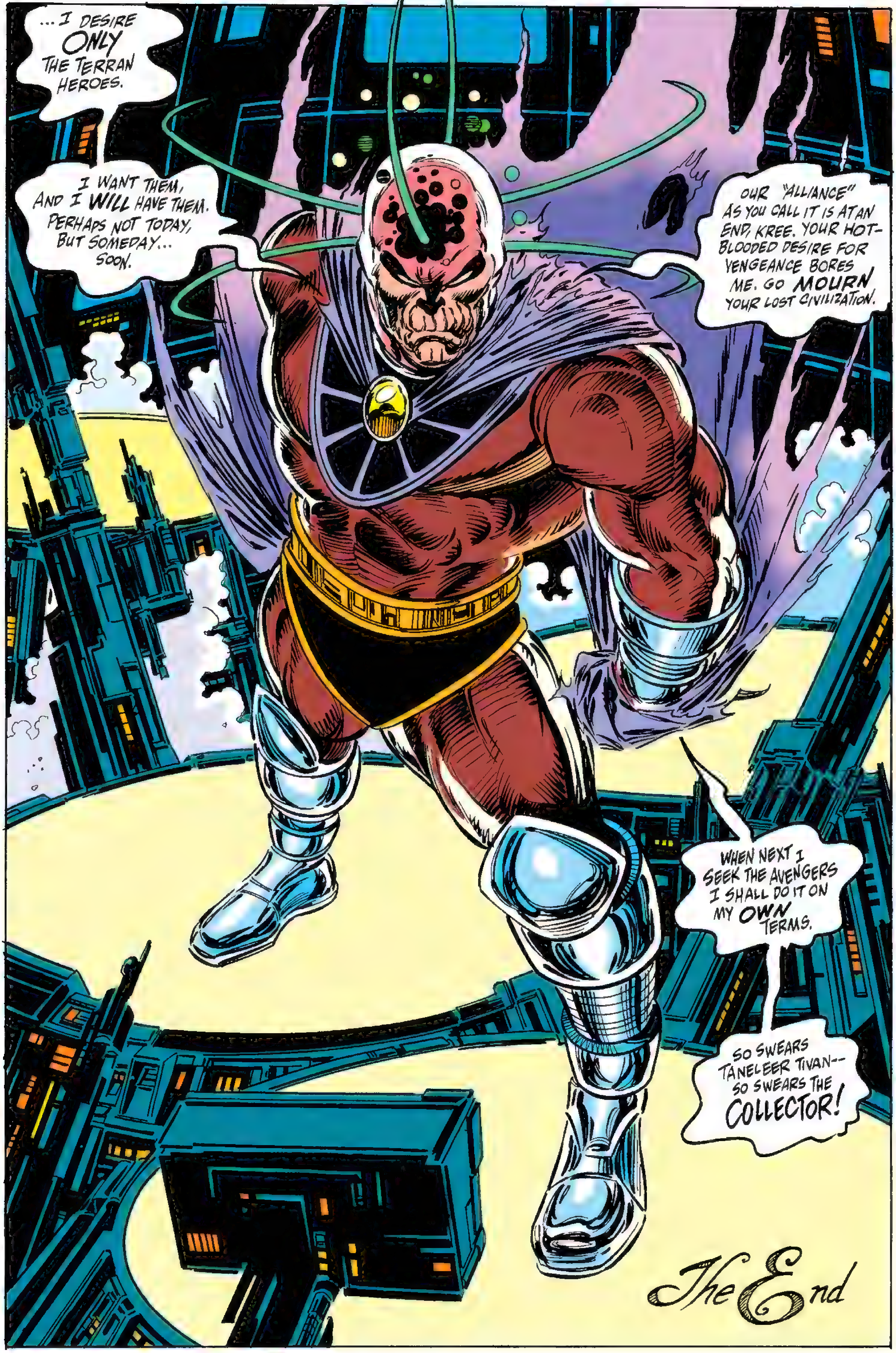

TWENTY-FIVE THOUSAND YEARS AGO, THE KREE EMPIRE, IN ITS **YOUTH** AND **ARROGANCE**, USED THIS ISLAND AS A BASE FOR ITS INITIAL TERRAN EXPLORATIONS...
... TODAY, THAT ISLAND **CEASES** TO EXIST...
...**VAPORIZED** IN THE SPACE OF TIME BETWEEN ONE SECOND AND THE NEXT.
AND INTO THE GAPING MAW WHERE THIS ISLAND ONCE WAS, THE SEA COLLAPSES.
WITH THE FORCE OF TEN THOUSAND **NIAGARAS** AND MORE, THE BOUNDLESS OCEAN **ROARS** IN TO FILL THE SUDDEN VOID.
AND FROM THE CENTER OF THIS SWIRLING, FURIOUS **WHIRLPOOL** COMES A **MIRACULOUS** SIGHT...
... THE MIGHTY **AVENGERS!**
C'MON, CAP, GIVE HER ALL SHE'S **GOT!**

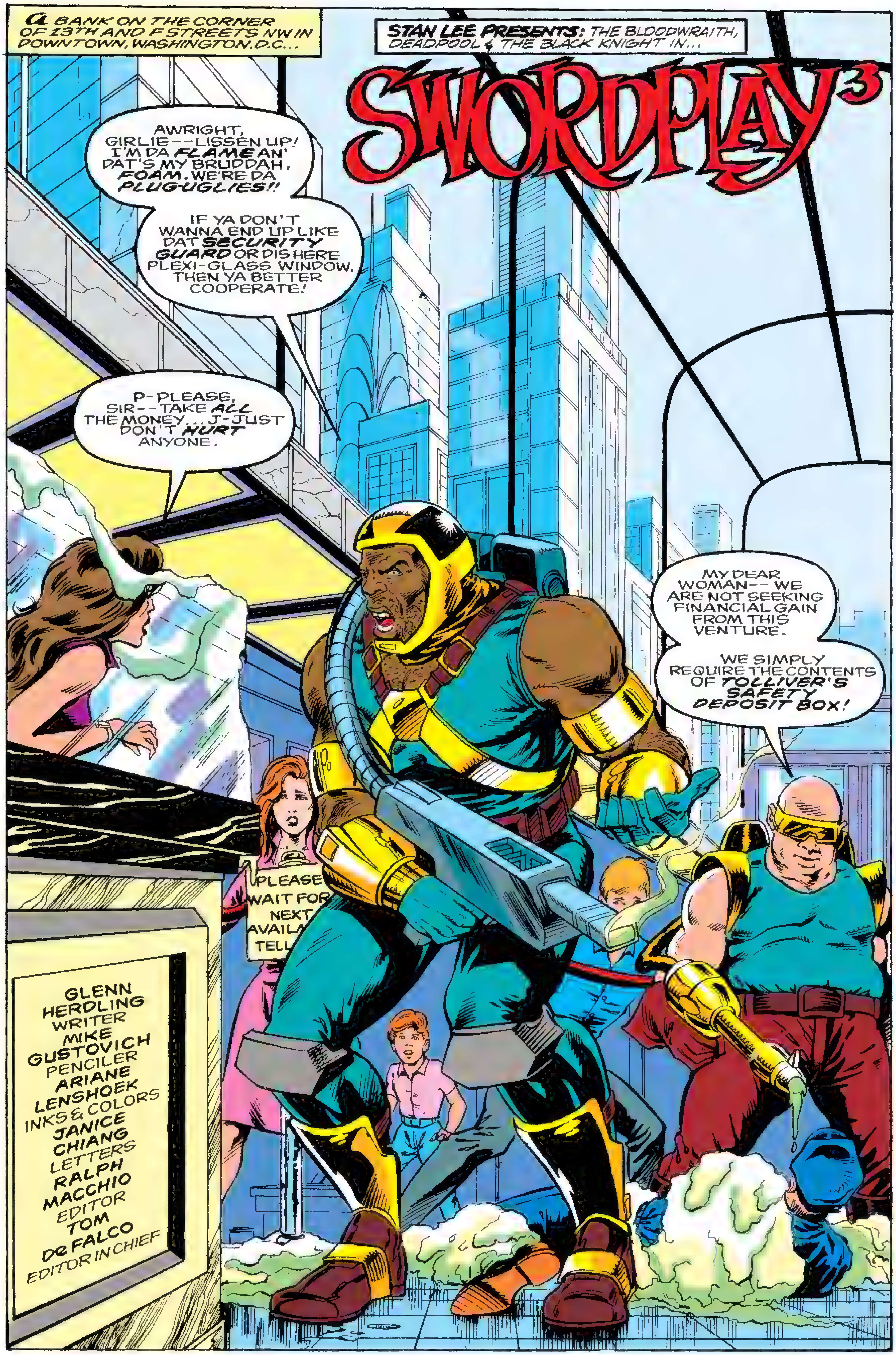

LATER, ON A NEARBY ATOLL...
THE WORLD LOST AN ISLAND TODAY...
...BUT THERE'S GOING TO BE A TOMORROW, AFTER ALL. NOT A BAD BARGAIN, IN THE END.
YOU KNOW, I'M THE ONLY ONE HERE WHO WAS A PART OF THIS TEAM WHEN IT STARTED WAY BACK WHEN...
...SO TAKE IT FROM AN OLD-TIMER WHEN I SAY, YOU DID GOOD TODAY, AVENGERS.
YOU DID GOOD.
AMEN TO THAT, HANK.


AT THE MEDIAN POINT BETWEEN THE EARTH AND ITS MOON...
BY PAMA'S LIGHT! THEY SURVIVED--
--AND EARTH ENDURES!
OUR PEOPLE'S BLOOD REMAINS UNAVENGED...

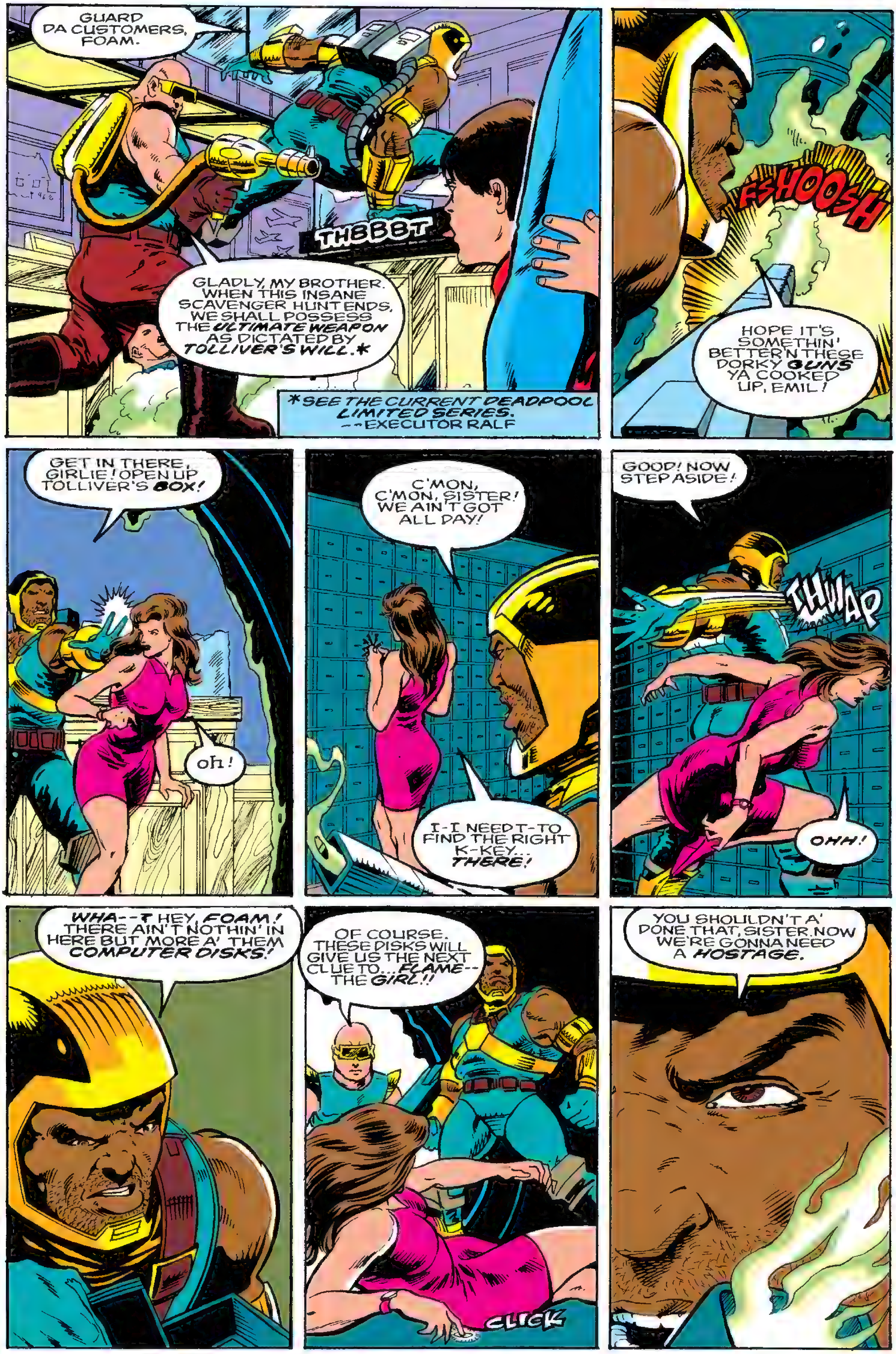

...AND MORE, I FAILED MY PART OF THE BARGAIN.
THE KREE ARE AN HONORABLE PEOPLE...
ONE DAY, I SHALL SEE THE AVENGERS PAY FOR THEIR CRIMES...

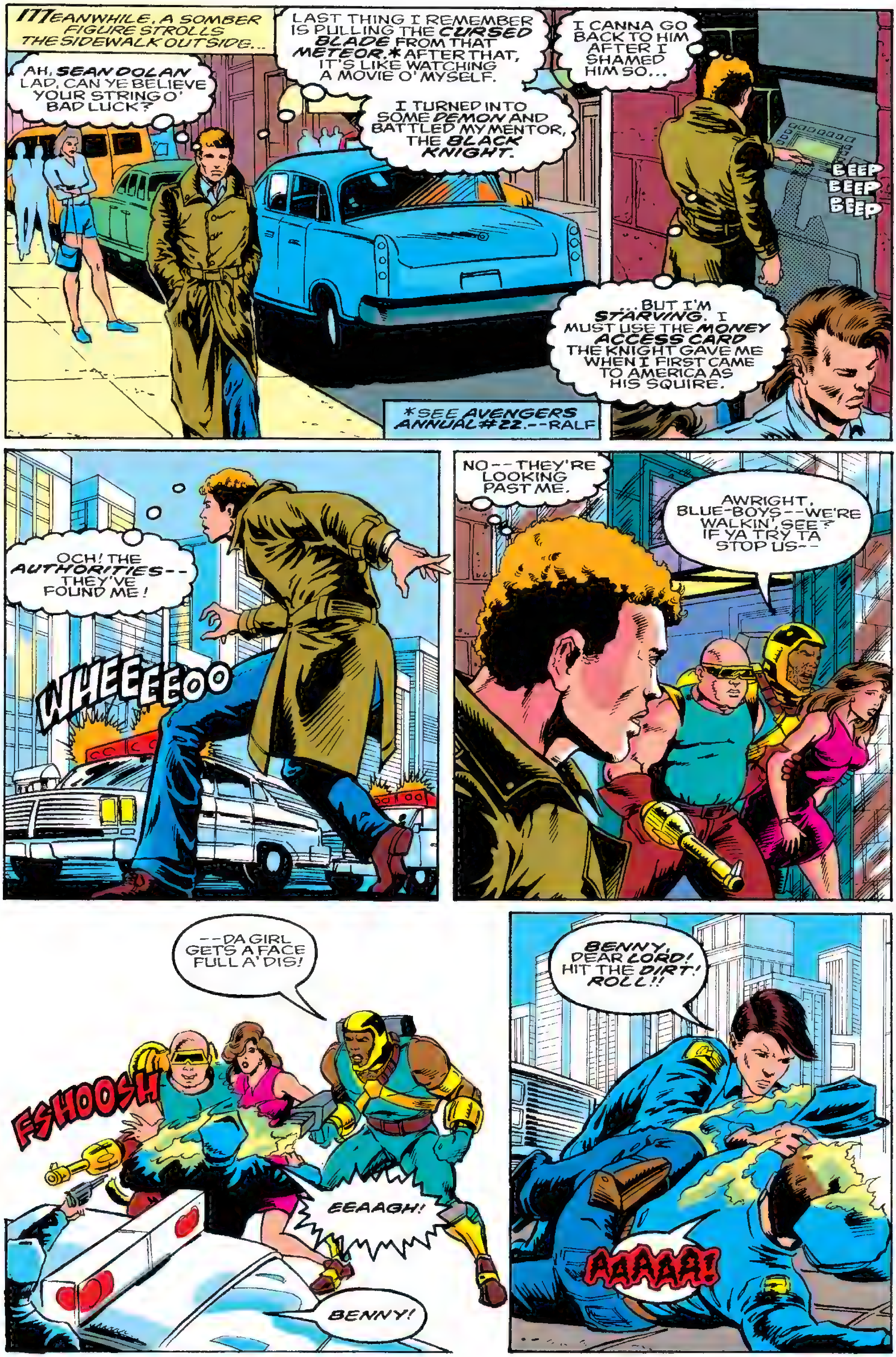

...AND PAY YOU BACK FOR YOUR ALLIANCE, ELDER. YOU HAVE THE WORD OF A TRUE-BORN KREE!
I CARE LITTLE FOR YOUR CONCEPTS OF HONOR, GALEN KOR...

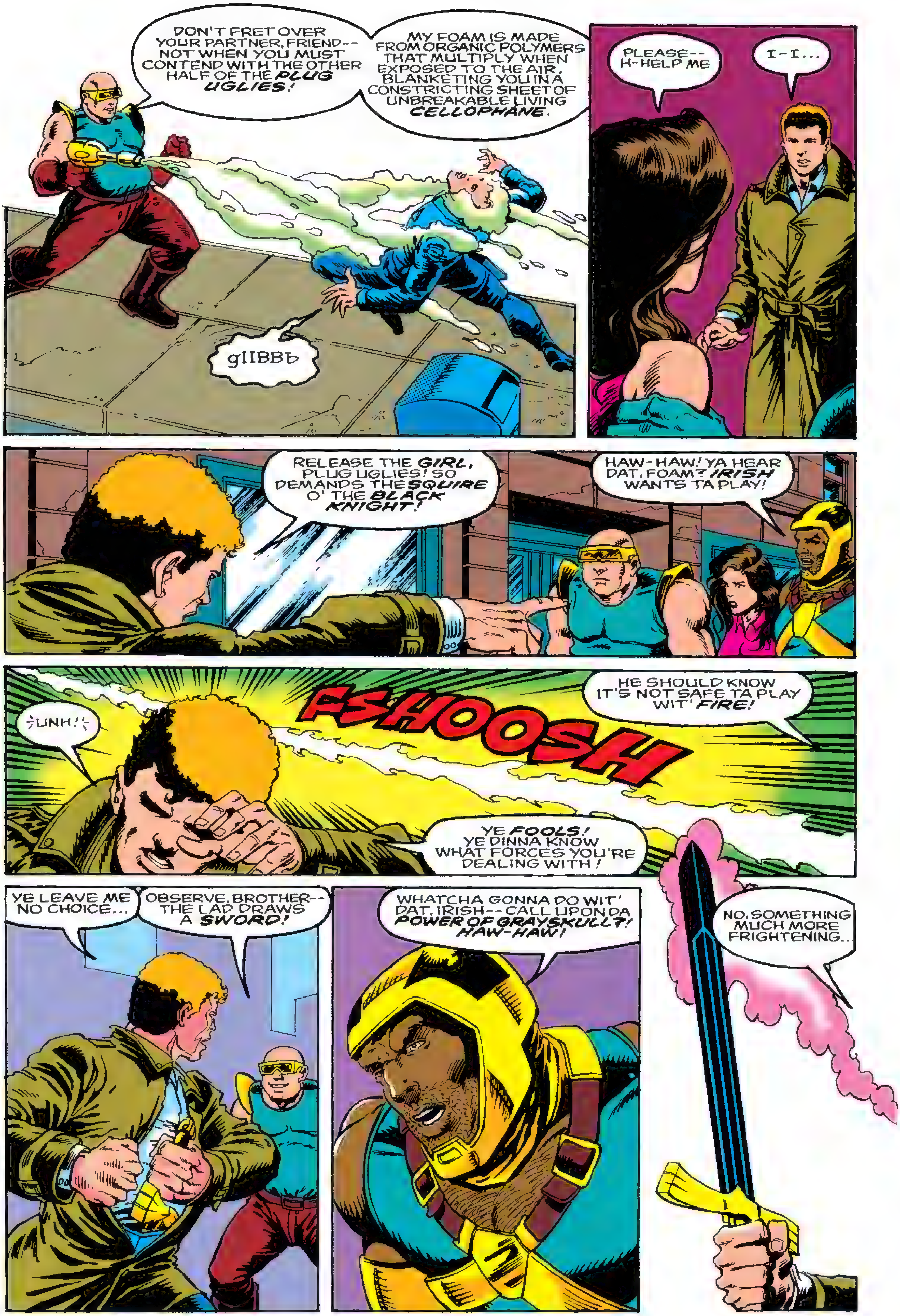

...I DESIRE ONLY THE TERRAN HEROES.
I WANT THEM, AND I WILL HAVE THEM. PERHAPS NOT TODAY, BUT SOMEDAY... SOON.
OUR "ALLIANCE" AS YOU CALL IT IS AT AN END, KREE. YOUR HOT-BLOODED DESIRE FOR VENGEANCE BORES ME. GO MOURN YOUR LOST CIVILIZATION.
WHEN NEXT I SEEK THE AVENGERS I SHALL DO IT ON MY OWN TERMS.
SO SWEARS TANELEER TIVAN-- SO SWEARS THE COLLECTOR!
The End

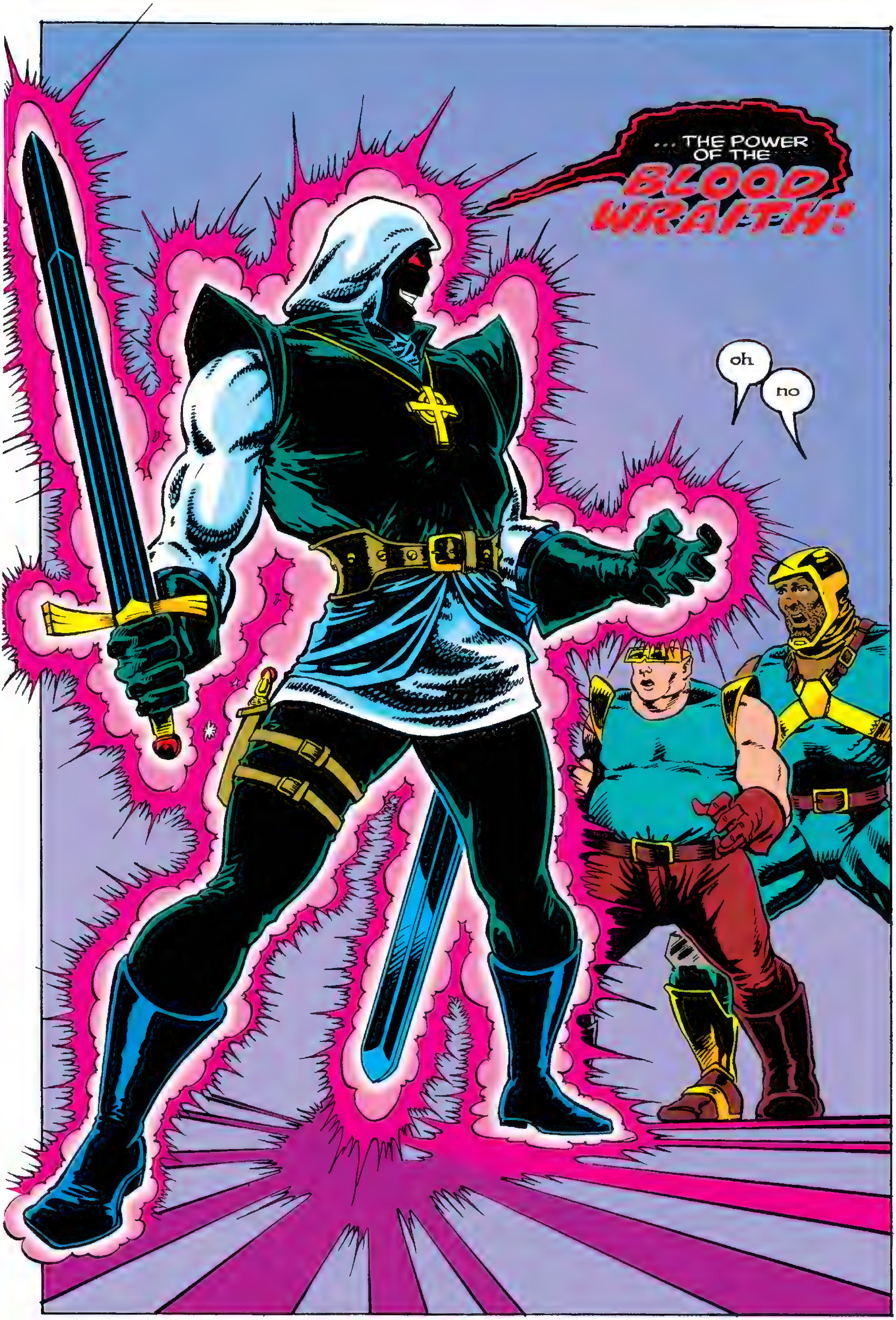


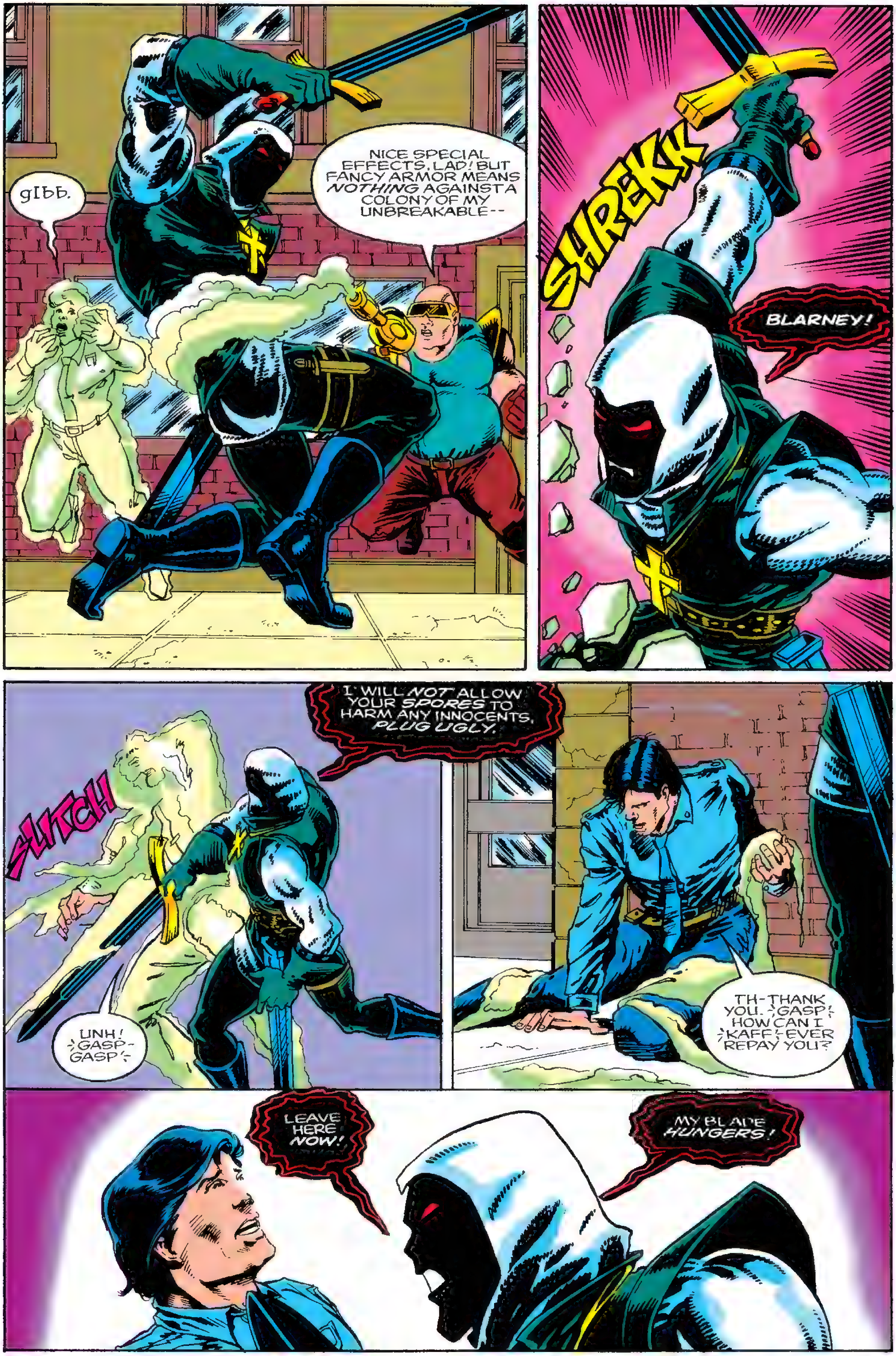
A BANK ON THE CORNER OF 13TH AND F STREETS NW IN DOWNTOWN, WASHINGTON, D.C...
STAN LEE PRESENTS: THE BLOODWRAITH, DEADPOOL & THE BLACK KNIGHT IN...
SWORDPLAY³
AWRIGHT, GIRLIE--LISSEN UP! I'M DA FLAME AN' DAT'S MY BRUDDAH, FOAM. WE'RE DA PLUG-UGLIES!!
IF YA DON'T WANNA END UP LIKE DAT SECURITY GUARD OR DIS HERE PLEXI-GLASS WINDOW, THEN YA BETTER COOPERATE!
P-PLEASE, SIR--TAKE ALL THE MONEY... J-JUST DON'T HURT ANYONE.
MY DEAR WOMAN-- WE ARE NOT SEEKING FINANCIAL GAIN FROM THIS VENTURE.
WE SIMPLY REQUIRE THE CONTENTS OF TOLLIVER'S SAFETY DEPOSIT BOX!
PLEASE WAIT FOR NEXT AVAILA TELL
GLENN HERDLING WRITER
MIKE GUSTOVICH PENCILER
ARIANE LENSHOEK INKS & COLORS
JANICE CHIANG LETTERS
RALPH MACCHIO EDITOR
TOM DeFALCO EDITOR IN CHIEF

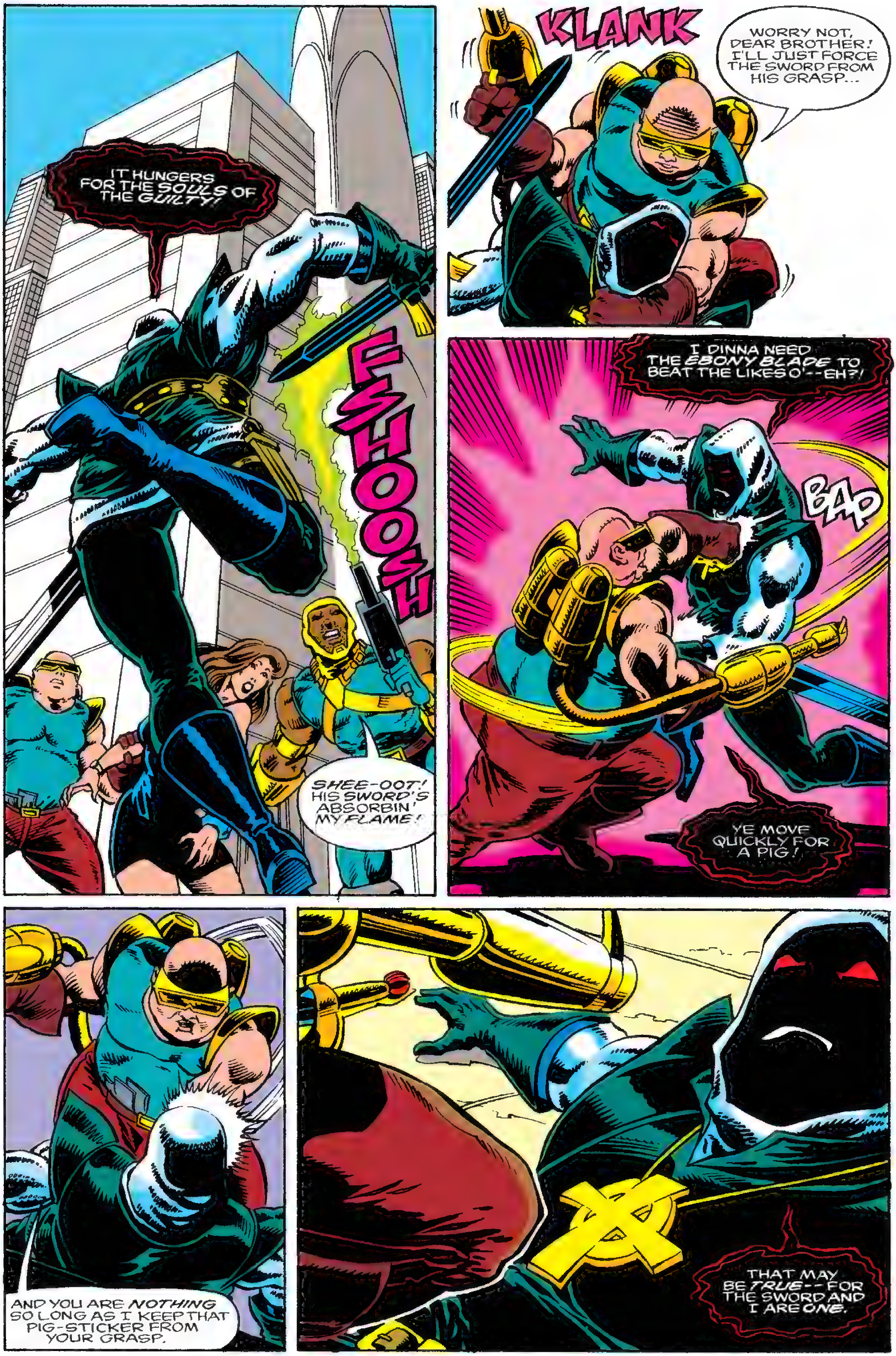

GUARD DA CUSTOMERS, FOAM.
THBBBT
GLADLY, MY BROTHER. WHEN THIS INSANE SCAVENGER HUNT ENDS, WE SHALL POSSESS THE ULTIMATE WEAPON AS DICTATED BY TOLLIVER'S WILL.*
*SEE THE CURRENT DEADPOOL LIMITED SERIES. --EXECUTOR RALF
FSHOOSH
HOPE IT'S SOMETHIN' BETTER'N THESE DORKY GUNS YA COOKED UP, EMIL!
GET IN THERE, GIRLIE! OPEN UP TOLLIVER'S BOX!
oh!
C'MON, C'MON, SISTER! WE AIN'T GOT ALL DAY!
I-I NEED T-TO FIND THE RIGHT K-KEY... THERE!
GOOD! NOW STEP ASIDE!
THWAP
OHH!
WHA--? HEY, FOAM! THERE AIN'T NOTHIN' IN HERE BUT MORE A' THEM COMPUTER DISKS!
OF COURSE. THESE DISKS WILL GIVE US THE NEXT CLUE TO... FLAME-- THE GIRL!!
CLICK
YOU SHOULDN'T A' DONE THAT, SISTER. NOW WE'RE GONNA NEED A HOSTAGE.

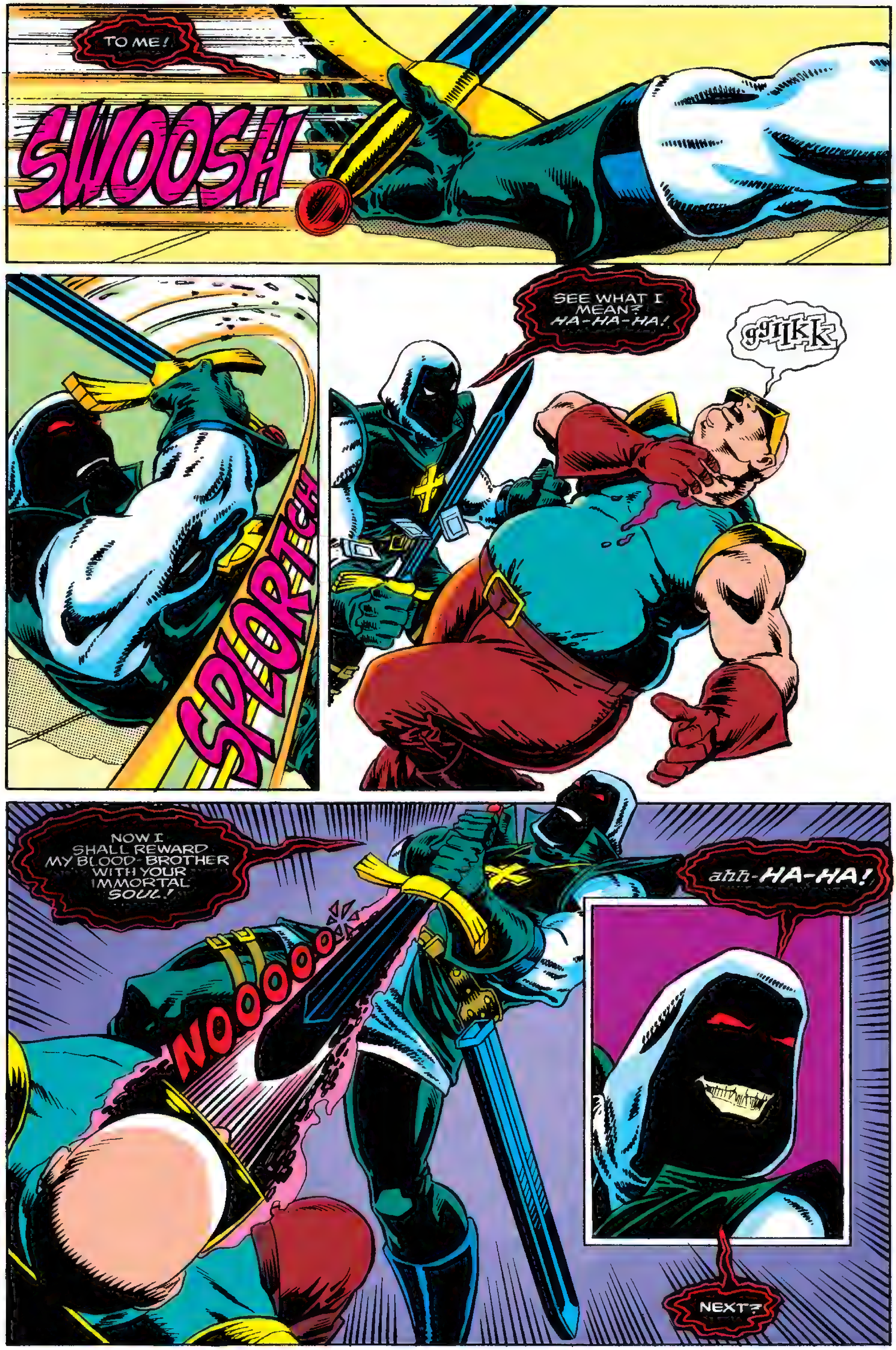

MEANWHILE, A SOMBER FIGURE STROLLS THE SIDEWALK OUTSIDE...
AH, SEAN DOLAN LAD, CAN YE BELIEVE YOUR STRING O' BAD LUCK?
LAST THING I REMEMBER IS PULLING THE CURSED BLADE FROM THAT METEOR.* AFTER THAT, IT'S LIKE WATCHING A MOVIE O' MYSELF.
I TURNED INTO SOME DEMON AND BATTLED MY MENTOR, THE BLACK KNIGHT.
*SEE AVENGERS ANNUAL #22.--RALF
I CANNA GO BACK TO HIM AFTER I SHAMED HIM SO...
BEEP BEEP BEEP
...BUT I'M STARVING. I MUST USE THE MONEY ACCESS CARD THE KNIGHT GAVE ME WHEN I FIRST CAME TO AMERICA AS HIS SQUIRE.
OCH! THE AUTHORITIES-- THEY'VE FOUND ME!
WHEEEEEOO
NO--THEY'RE LOOKING PAST ME.
AWRIGHT, BLUE-BOYS--WE'RE WALKIN', SEE? IF YA TRY TA STOP US--
--DA GIRL GET'S A FACE FULL A' DIS!
FSHOOSH
EEAAGH!
BENNY!
BENNY, DEAR LORD! HIT THE DIRT! ROLL!!
AAAAA!

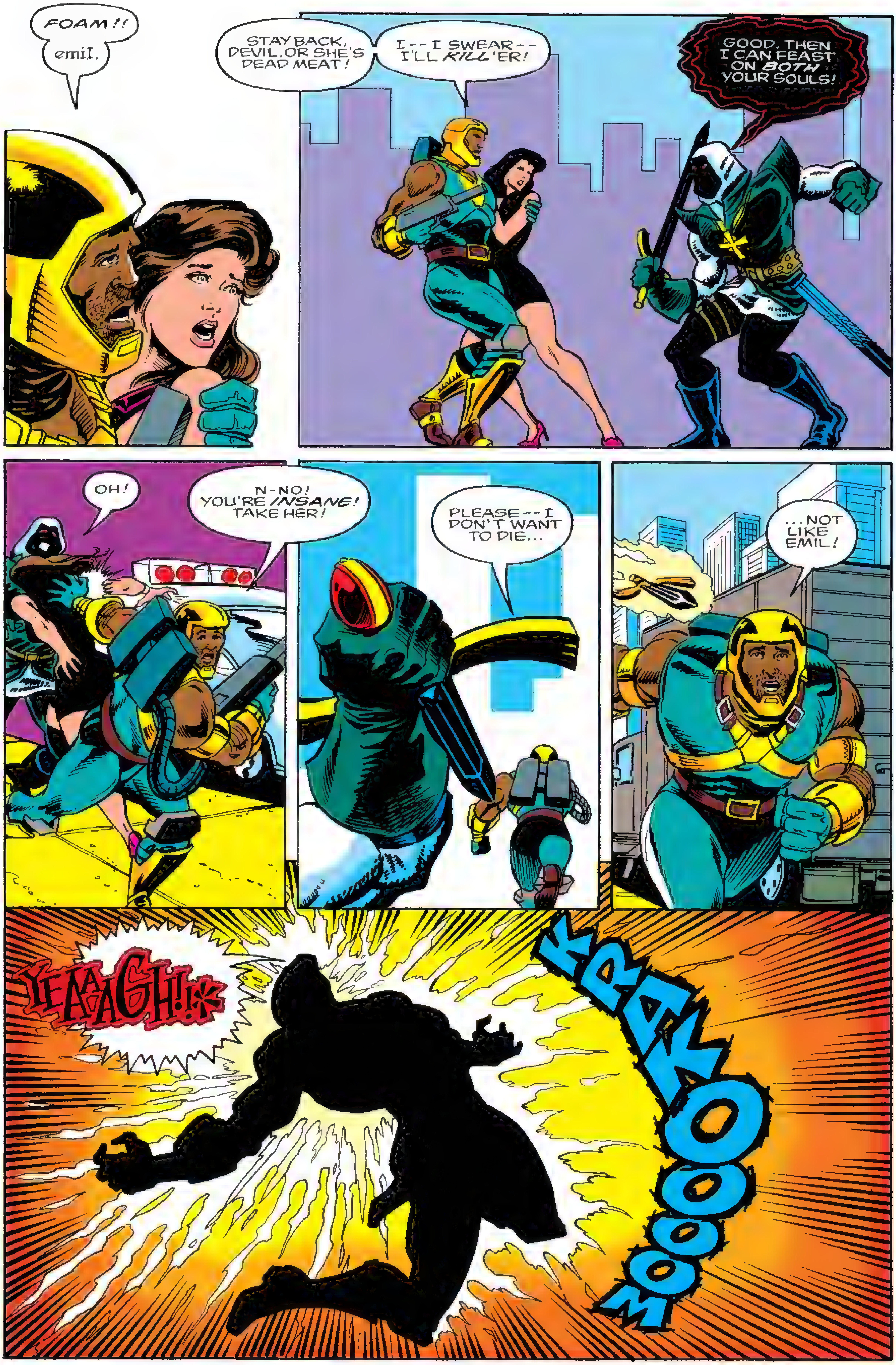

DON'T FRET OVER YOUR PARTNER, FRIEND-- NOT WHEN YOU MUST CONTEND WITH THE OTHER HALF OF THE *PLUG UGLIES!*
MY FOAM IS MADE FROM ORGANIC POLYMERS THAT MULTIPLY WHEN EXPOSED TO THE AIR, BLANKETING YOU IN A CONSTRICTING SHEET OF UNBREAKABLE LIVING *CELLOPHANE*.
gIIBBb
PLEASE-- H-HELP ME
I-I...
RELEASE THE *GIRL*, PLUG UGLIES! SO DEMANDS THE *SQUIRE* O' THE *BLACK KNIGHT!*
HAW-HAW! YA HEAR DAT, FOAM? *IRISH* WANTS TA PLAY!
UNH!
FSHOOSH
HE SHOULD KNOW IT'S NOT SAFE TA PLAY WIT' *FIRE!*
YE *FOOLS!* YE DINNA KNOW WHAT FORCES YOU'RE DEALING WITH!
YE LEAVE ME NO CHOICE...
OBSERVE, BROTHER-- THE LAD DRAWS A *SWORD!*
WHATCHA GONNA DO WIT' DAT, IRISH-- CALL UPON DA *POWER OF GRAYSKULL?! HAW-HAW!*
NO, SOMETHING MUCH MORE FRIGHTENING...

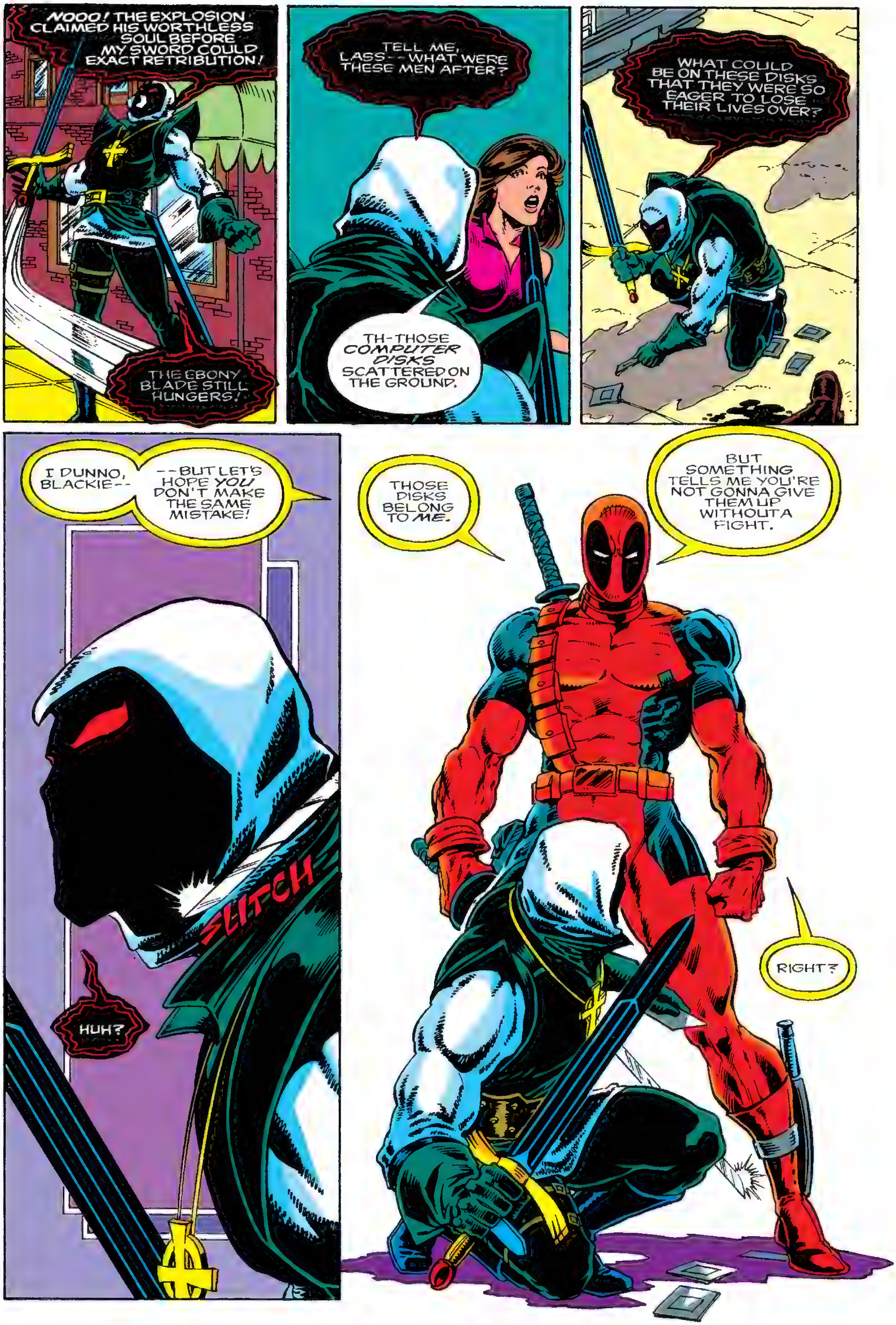

...THE POWER OF THE BLOOD WRAITH!
oh
no

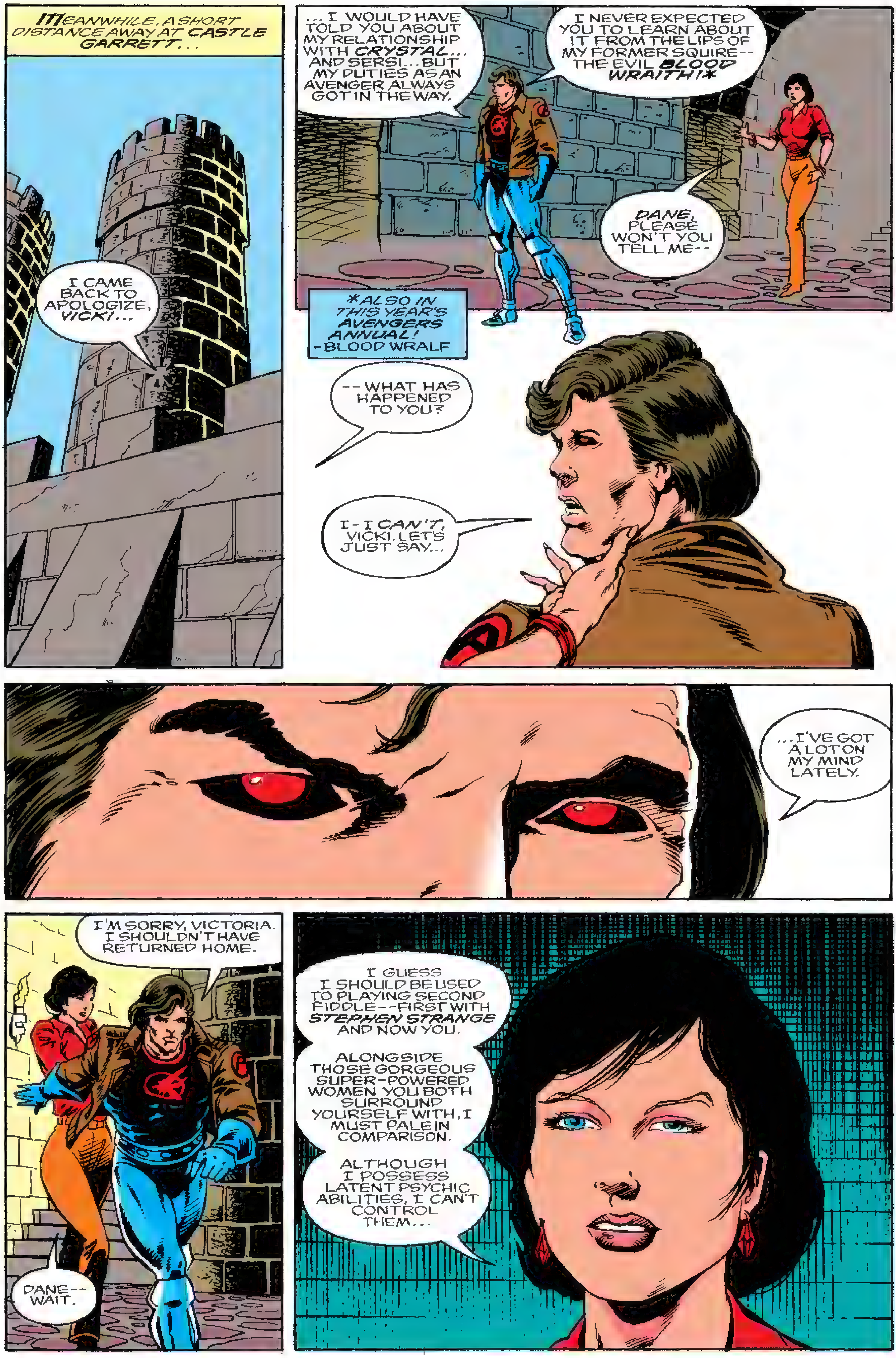

gIbb.
NICE SPECIAL EFFECTS, LAD! BUT FANCY ARMOR MEANS *NOTHING* AGAINST A COLONY OF MY UNBREAKABLE--
SHREKK
BLARNEY!
I WILL *NOT* ALLOW YOUR *SPORES* TO HARM ANY INNOCENTS, *PLUG UGLY.*
SLITCH
UNH! -GASP- GASP-
TH-THANK YOU. -GASP- HOW CAN I -KAFF- EVER REPAY YOU?
LEAVE HERE *NOW!*
MY BLADE *HUNGERS!*

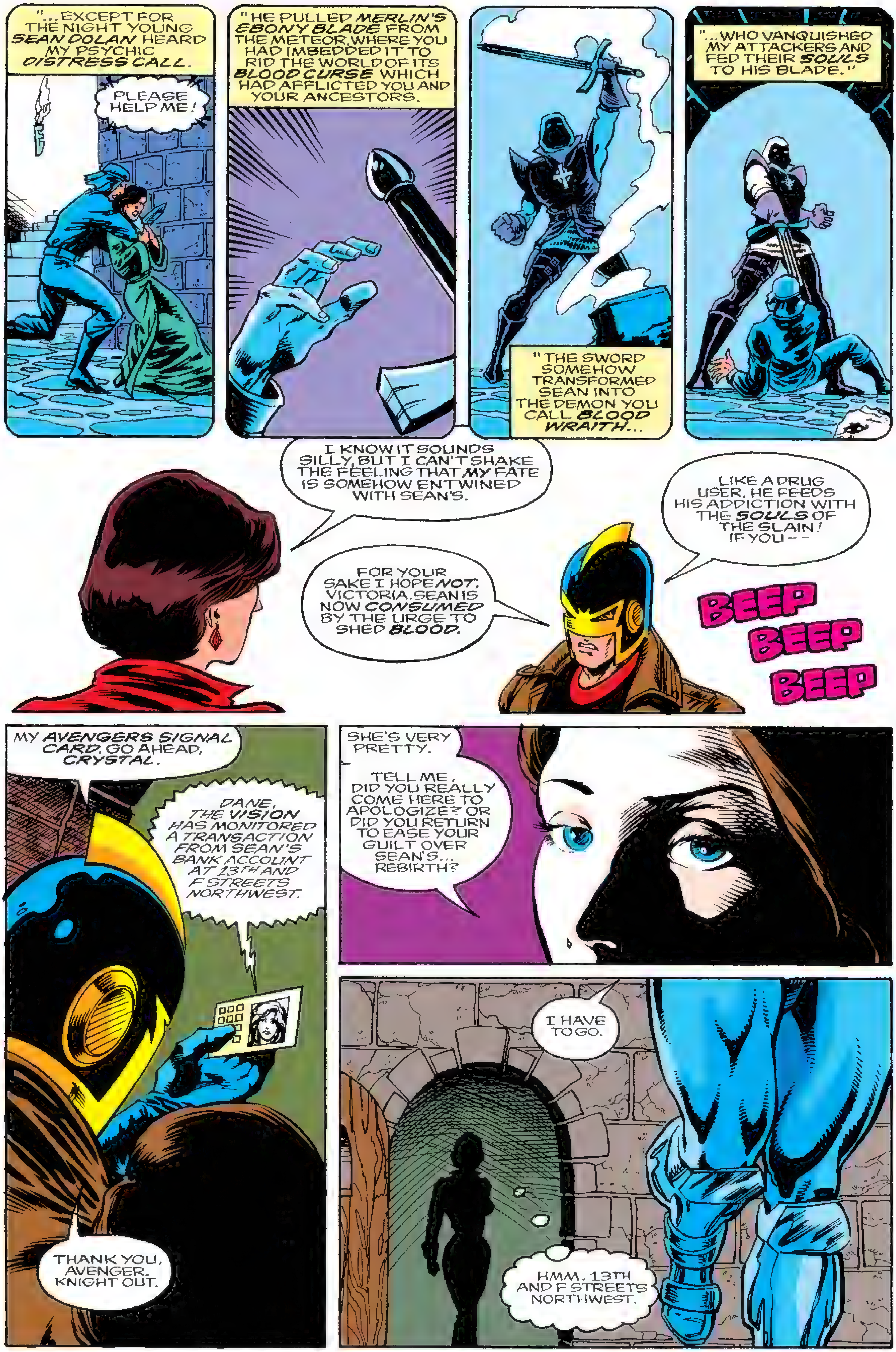

IT HUNGERS FOR THE *SOULS* OF THE *GUILTY!*
FSHOOSH
SHEE-OOT! HIS *SWORD'S* ABSORBIN' MY *FLAME!*
KLANK
WORRY NOT, DEAR BROTHER! I'LL JUST FORCE THE SWORD FROM HIS GRASP...
I DINNA NEED THE *EBONY BLADE* TO BEAT THE LIKES O'--EH?!
BAP
YE MOVE QUICKLY FOR A *PIG!*
AND YOU ARE *NOTHING* SO LONG AS I KEEP THAT PIG-STICKER FROM YOUR GRASP.
THAT MAY BE *TRUE*--FOR THE SWORD AND I ARE *ONE.*


TO ME!
SWOOSH
SPLORTCH
SEE WHAT I MEAN? HA-HA-HA!
ggIlKk
NOW I SHALL REWARD MY BLOOD-BROTHER WITH YOUR IMMORTAL SOUL!
NOOOOOO
ahh-HA-HA!
NEXT?

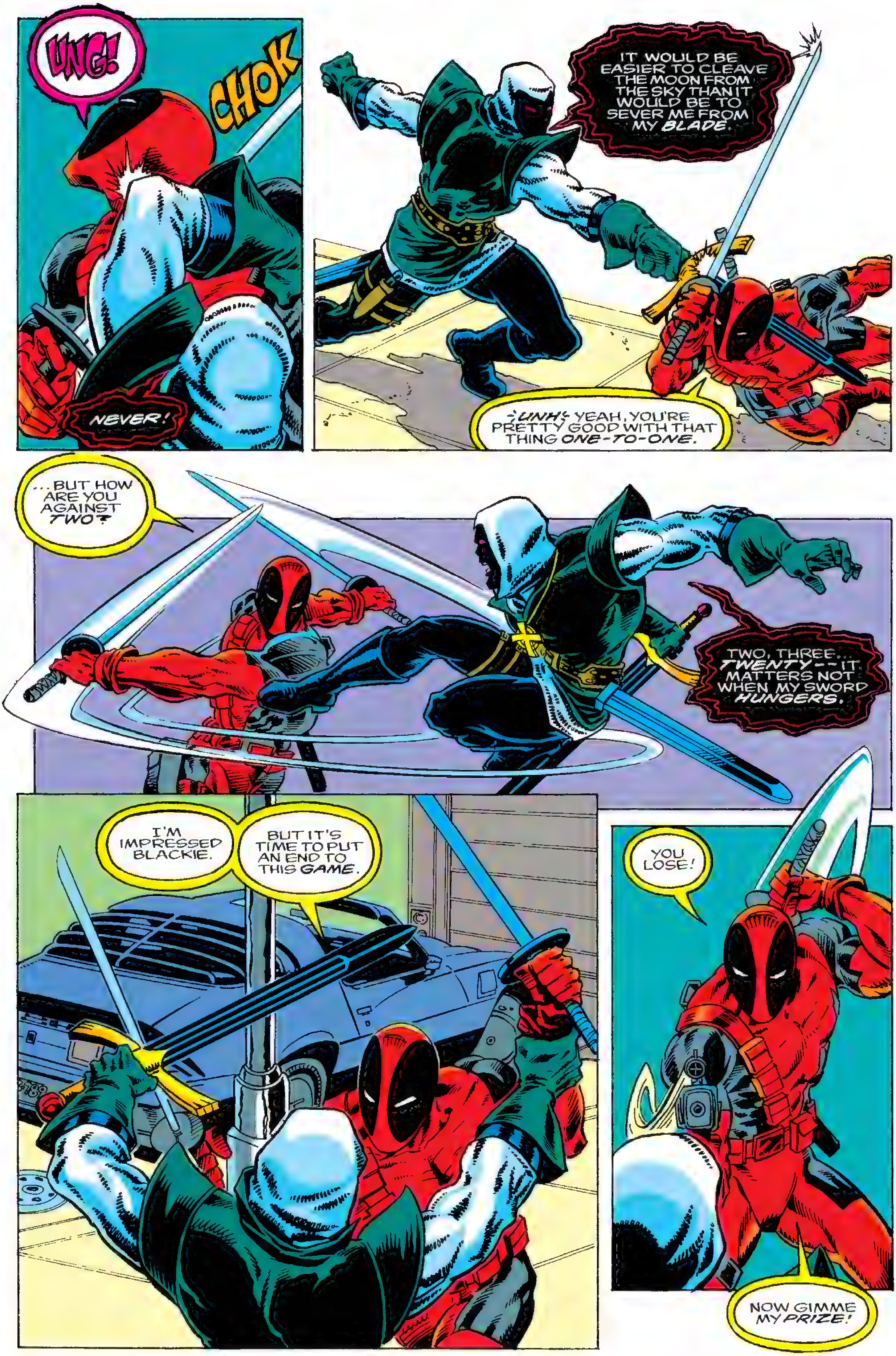

FOAM!! emiI.
STAY BACK, DEVIL, OR SHE'S DEAD MEAT!
I--I SWEAR--I'LL *KILL* 'ER!
GOOD. THEN I CAN FEAST ON *BOTH* YOUR SOULS!
OH!
N-NO! YOU'RE *INSANE!* TAKE HER!
PLEASE--I DON'T WANT TO DIE...
...NOT LIKE EMIL!
YEAAAGH!!*
KRAKOOOOOOOM

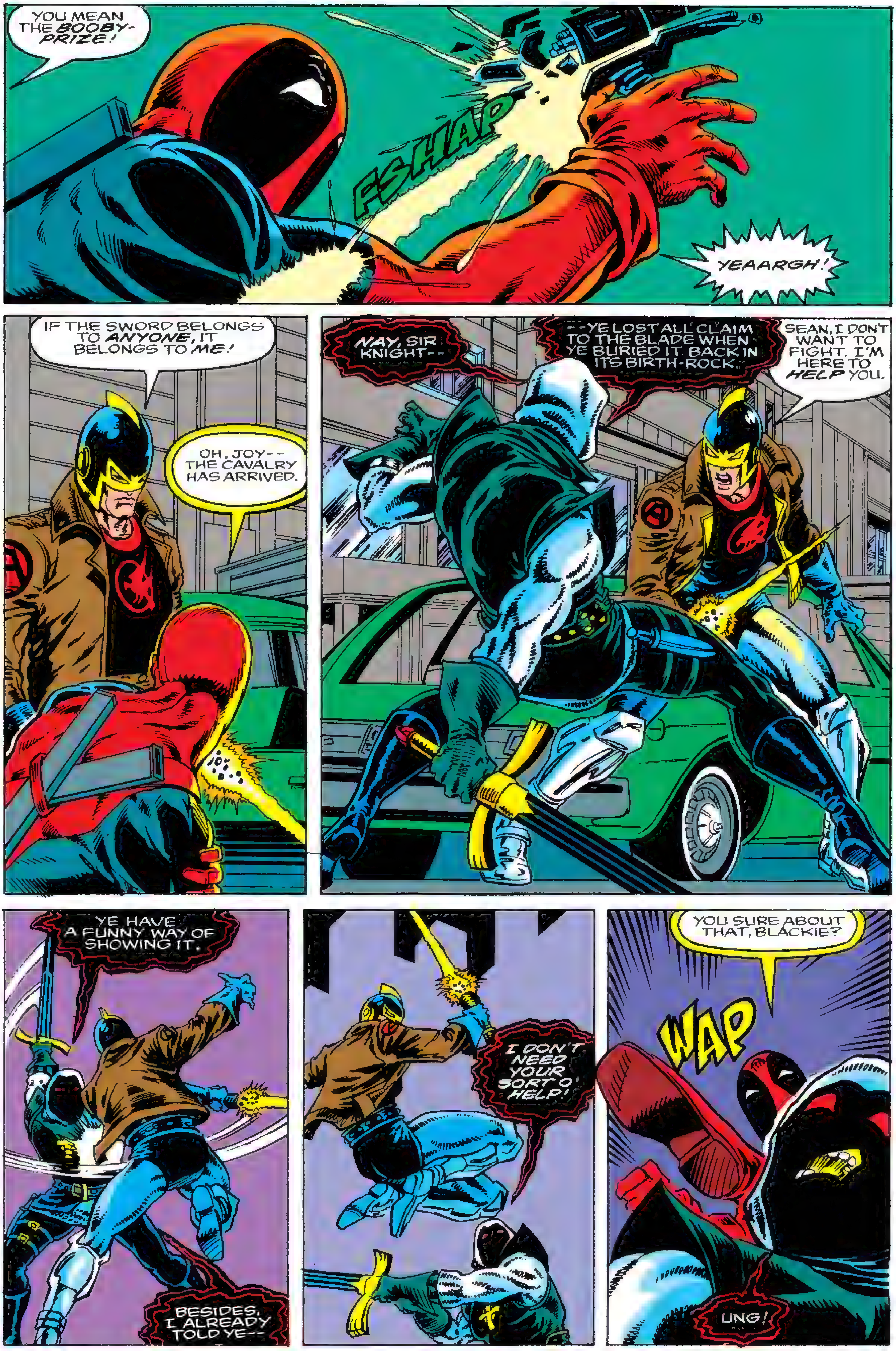

NOOO! THE EXPLOSION CLAIMED HIS WORTHLESS SOUL BEFORE MY SWORD COULD EXACT RETRIBUTION!
THE EBONY BLADE STILL HUNGERS!
TELL ME, LASS-- WHAT WERE THESE MEN AFTER?
TH-THOSE COMPUTER DISKS SCATTERED ON THE GROUND.
WHAT COULD BE ON THESE DISKS THAT THEY WERE SO EAGER TO LOSE THEIR LIVES OVER?
I DUNNO, BLACKIE--
--BUT LET'S HOPE YOU DON'T MAKE THE SAME MISTAKE!
SLITCH
HUH?
THOSE DISKS BELONG TO ME.
BUT SOMETHING TELLS ME YOU'RE NOT GONNA GIVE THEM UP WITHOUT A FIGHT.
RIGHT?


MEANWHILE, A SHORT DISTANCE AWAY AT CASTLE GARRETT...
I CAME BACK TO APOLOGIZE, VICKI...
...I WOULD HAVE TOLD YOU ABOUT MY RELATIONSHIP WITH CRYSTAL... AND SERSI... BUT MY DUTIES AS AN AVENGER ALWAYS GOT IN THE WAY.
I NEVER EXPECTED YOU TO LEARN ABOUT IT FROM THE LIPS OF MY FORMER SQUIRE-- THE EVIL BLOOD WRAITH!*
DANE, PLEASE WON'T YOU TELL ME--
*ALSO IN THIS YEAR'S AVENGERS ANNUAL! -BLOOD WRALF
--WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO YOU?
I-I CAN'T, VICKI. LET'S JUST SAY...
...I'VE GOT A LOT ON MY MIND LATELY.
I'M SORRY, VICTORIA. I SHOULDN'T HAVE RETURNED HOME.
DANE-- WAIT.
I GUESS I SHOULD BE USED TO PLAYING SECOND FIDDLE--FIRST WITH STEPHEN STRANGE AND NOW YOU.
ALONGSIDE THOSE GORGEOUS SUPER-POWERED WOMEN YOU BOTH SURROUND YOURSELF WITH, I MUST PALE IN COMPARISON.
ALTHOUGH I POSSESS LATENT PSYCHIC ABILITIES, I CAN'T CONTROL THEM...

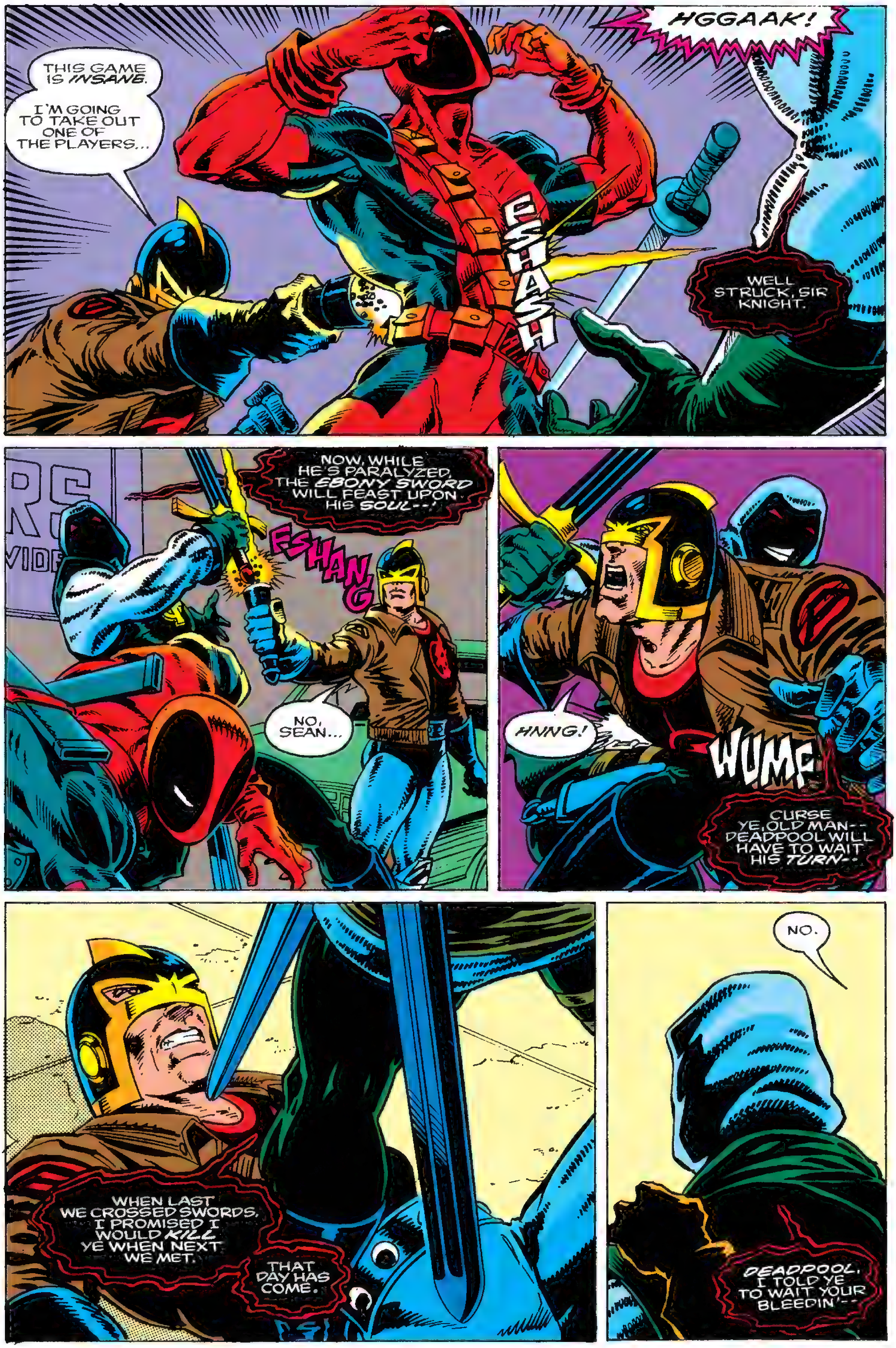

"...EXCEPT FOR THE NIGHT YOUNG SEAN DOLAN HEARD MY PSYCHIC DISTRESS CALL.
PLEASE HELP ME!
"HE PULLED MERLIN'S EBONY BLADE FROM THE METEOR, WHERE YOU HAD IMBEDDED IT TO RID THE WORLD OF ITS BLOOD CURSE WHICH HAD AFFLICTED YOU AND YOUR ANCESTORS.
"THE SWORD SOMEHOW TRANSFORMED SEAN INTO THE DEMON YOU CALL BLOOD WRAITH...
"...WHO VANQUISHED MY ATTACKERS AND FED THEIR SOULS TO HIS BLADE."
I KNOW IT SOUNDS SILLY, BUT I CAN'T SHAKE THE FEELING THAT MY FATE IS SOMEHOW ENTWINED WITH SEAN'S.
FOR YOUR SAKE I HOPE NOT, VICTORIA. SEAN IS NOW CONSUMED BY THE URGE TO SHED BLOOD.
LIKE A DRUG USER, HE FEEDS HIS ADDICTION WITH THE SOULS OF THE SLAIN! IF YOU--
BEEP BEEP BEEP
MY AVENGERS SIGNAL CARD. GO AHEAD, CRYSTAL.
DANE, THE VISION HAS MONITORED A TRANSACTION FROM SEAN'S BANK ACCOUNT AT 13TH AND F STREETS NORTHWEST.
THANK YOU, AVENGER. KNIGHT OUT.
SHE'S VERY PRETTY.
TELL ME, DID YOU REALLY COME HERE TO APOLOGIZE? OR DID YOU RETURN TO EASE YOUR GUILT OVER SEAN'S... REBIRTH?
I HAVE TO GO.
HMM. 13TH AND F STREETS NORTHWEST.

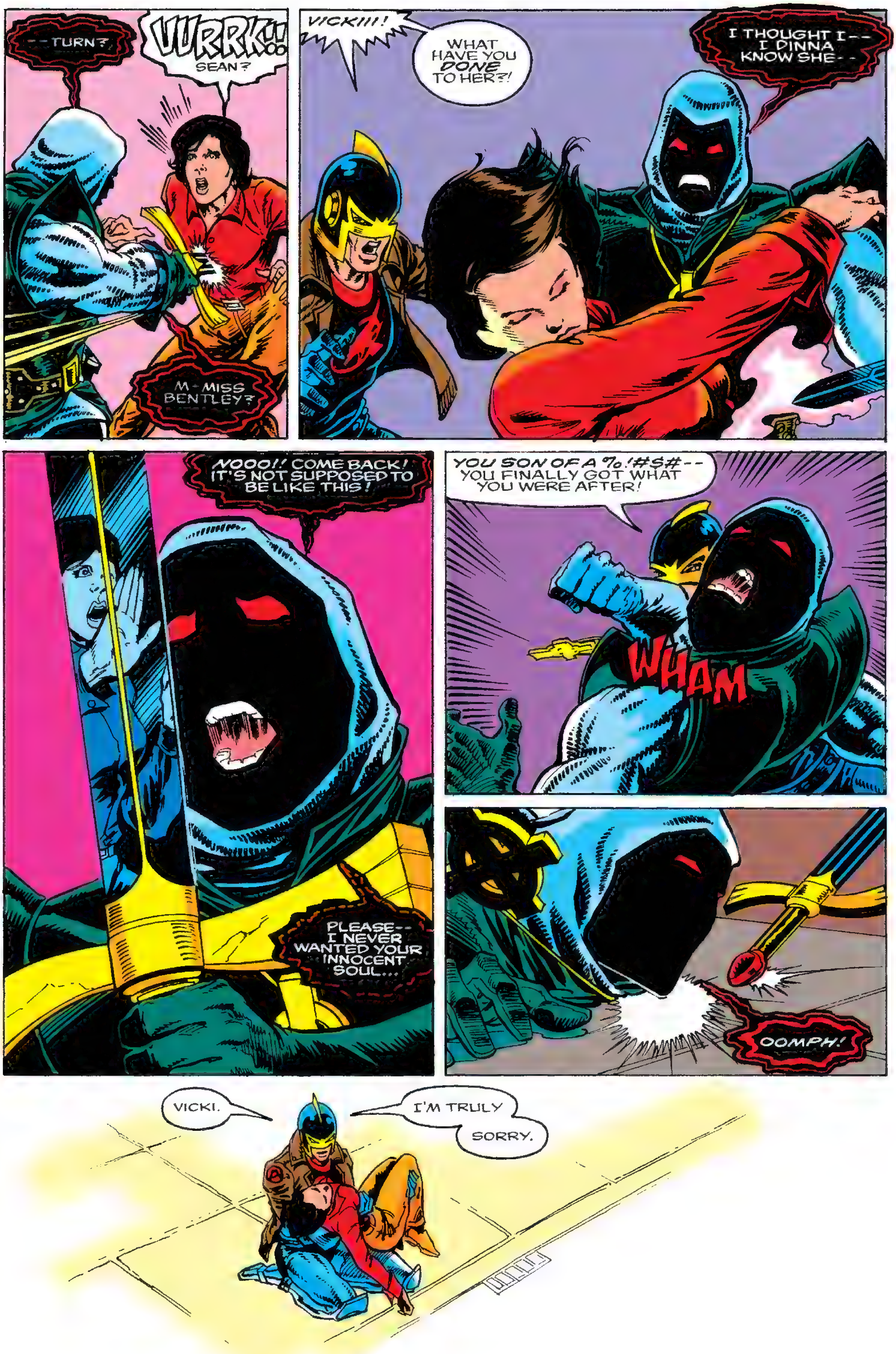
IF THESE DISKS LEAD TO SOME *GREATER PRIZE*, THEN WHY WOULD I LET THEM FALL INTO YOUR HANDS?
THAT'S JUST IT, BRIGHT BOY--
--YOU *WOULDN'T!*
BUT MY DECEASED *EMPLOYER* SET UP THIS MAD CHASE IN HIS *WILL*...
THWAP
...AND THE PRIZE IS THE *MOST POWERFUL WEAPON* IN THE *WORLD!*
CHANK
HA!
CLANK
I NEED NO OTHER WEAPON THAN THAT WHICH WAS FORGED BY *MERLIN* TO SLICE THROUGH--
--ANYTHING?
MAYBE SO, EXCEPT FOR THE *ENERGY FIELD* I CHARGE *MY* TOOTHPICK WITH.
GIVE ME YOUR *SWORD*. IF IT'S ALL YOU SAY IT IS, IT COULD BE THE WEAPON *TOLLIVER* INDICATED.

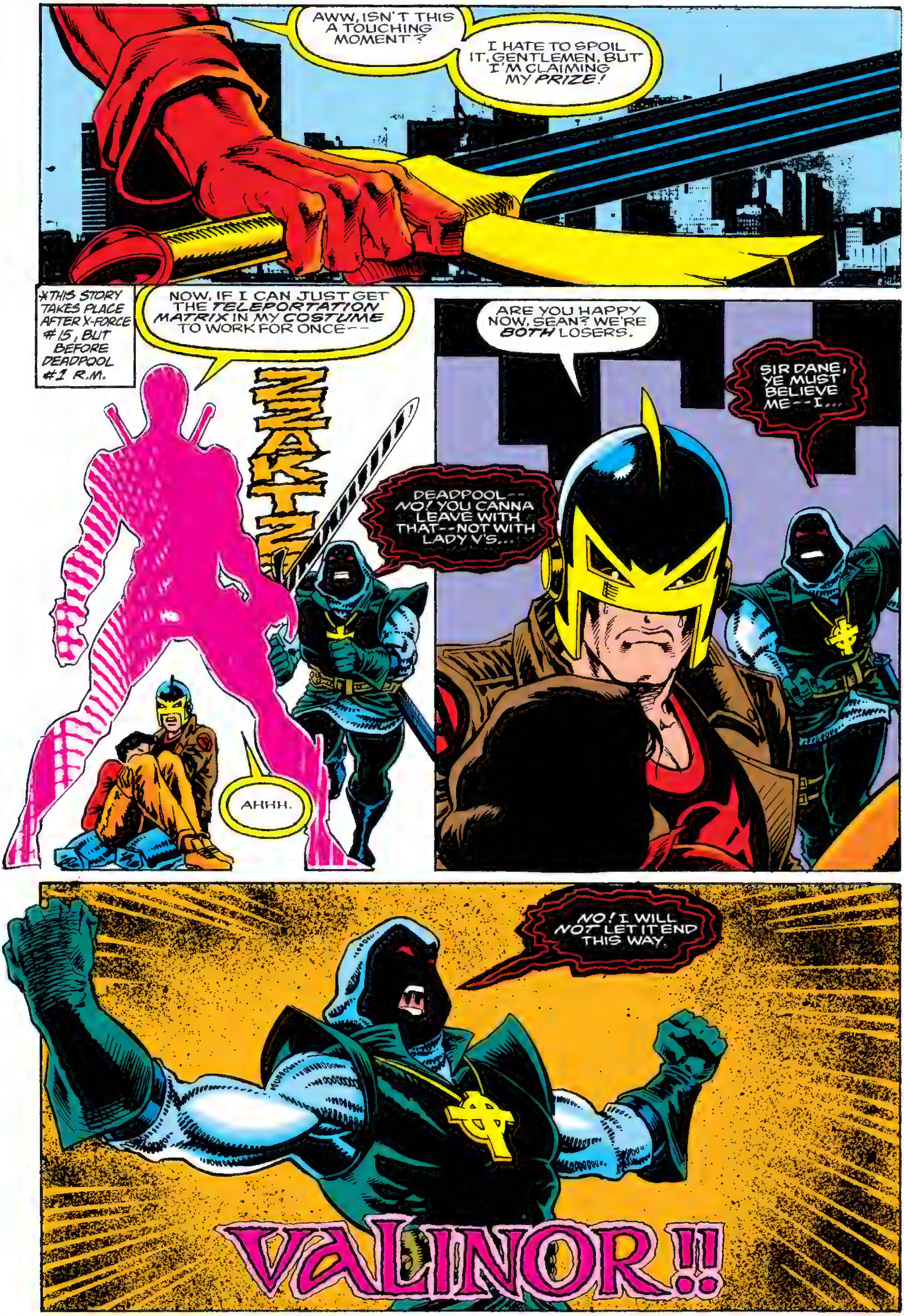

UNG!
CHOK
NEVER!
IT WOULD BE EASIER TO CLEAVE THE MOON FROM THE SKY THAN IT WOULD BE TO SEVER ME FROM MY *BLADE*.
UNH YEAH, YOU'RE PRETTY GOOD WITH THAT THING *ONE-TO-ONE*.
...BUT HOW ARE YOU AGAINST *TWO?*
TWO, THREE... *TWENTY*--IT MATTERS NOT WHEN MY SWORD *HUNGERS*.
I'M IMPRESSED BLACKIE.
BUT IT'S TIME TO PUT AN END TO THIS *GAME*.
YOU LOSE!
NOW GIMME MY *PRIZE!*

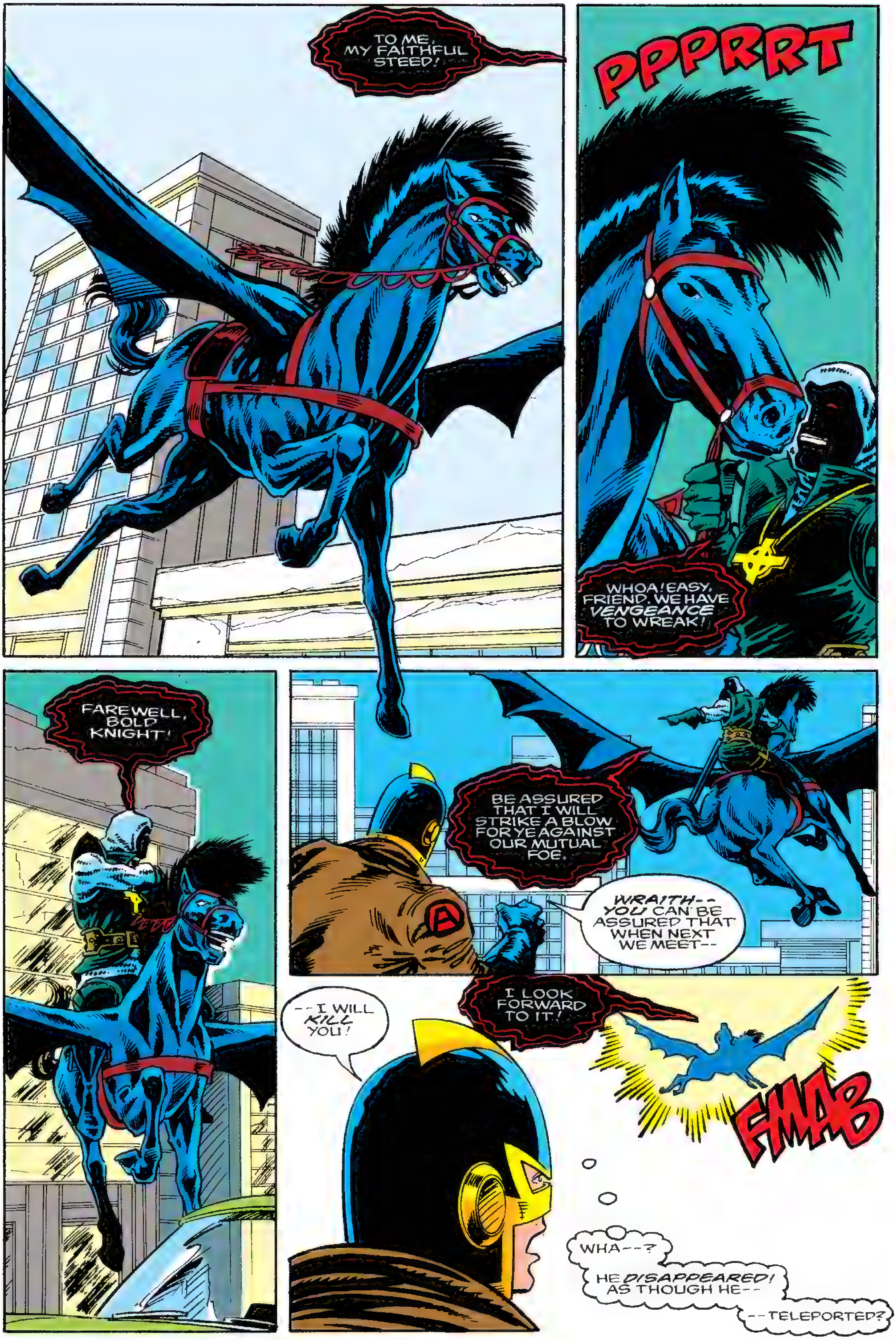

YOU MEAN THE *BOOBY-PRIZE!*
FSHAP
YEAARGH!
IF THE SWORD BELONGS TO *ANYONE*, IT BELONGS TO *ME!*
OH, JOY-- THE CAVALRY HAS ARRIVED.
NAY, SIR KNIGHT--
--YE LOST ALL CLAIM TO THE BLADE WHEN YE BURIED IT BACK IN ITS BIRTH-ROCK.
SEAN, I DON'T WANT TO FIGHT. I'M HERE TO *HELP* YOU.
YE HAVE A FUNNY WAY OF SHOWING IT.
BESIDES, I ALREADY TOLD YE--
I DON'T NEED YOUR SORT O' HELP!
YOU SURE ABOUT THAT, BLACKIE?
WAP
UNG!

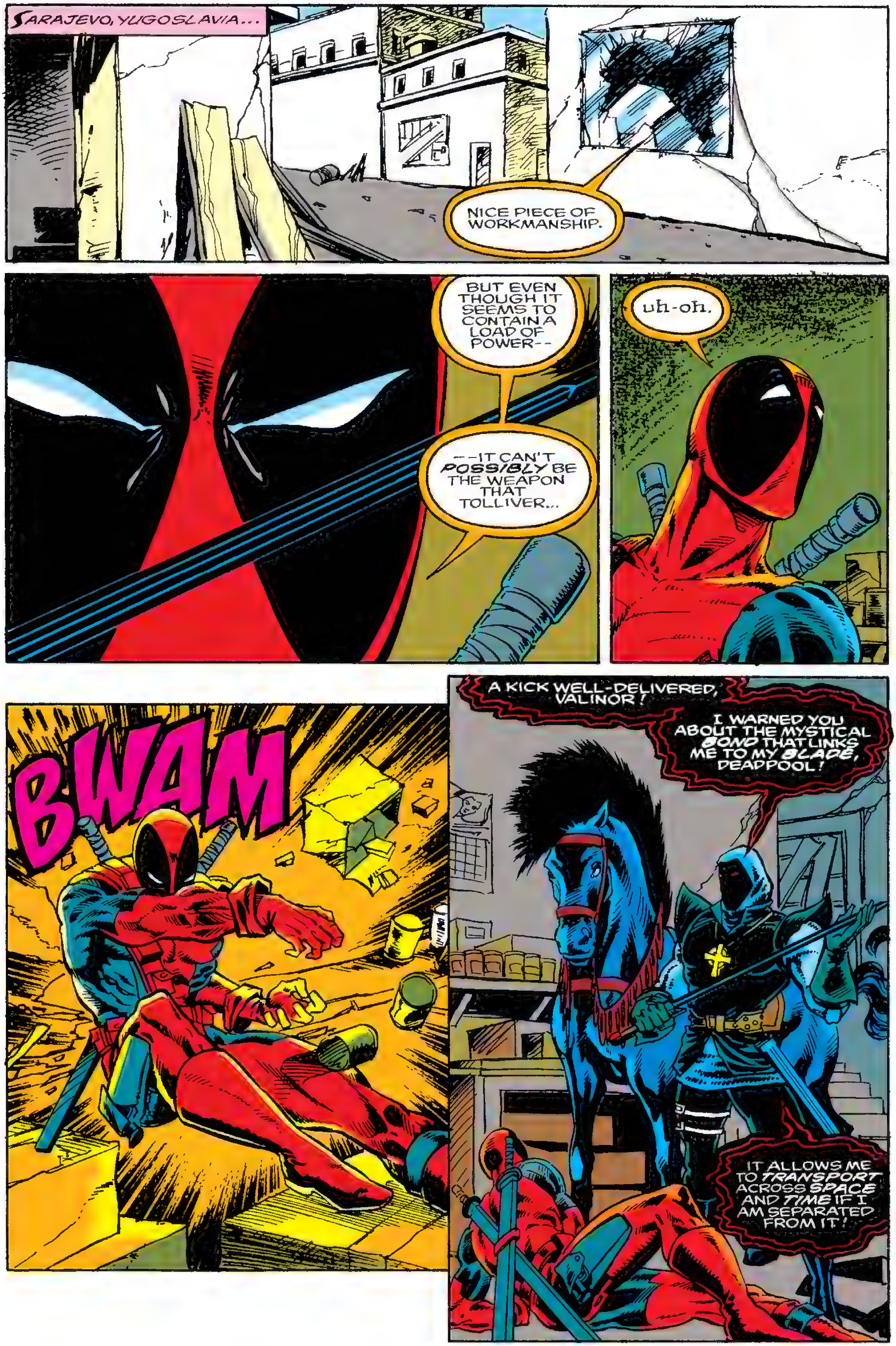
YOU RECOVERED QUICKLY FROM MY NEURAL DISRUPTER, MISTER--
CALL ME DEADPOOL. I PROBABLY HAVEN'T MADE IT INTO YOUR ROGUES FILE.
FSHAP
YET.
YE WOULDN'T BE STARTIN' THIS PARTY WITHOUT ME, WOULD YE, BOYS?
WOULDN'T DREAM OF IT, SEAN.
THE THREE MUSKETEERS NEVER HAD IT THIS GOOD!
SEAN, LET'S PUT ASIDE OUR DIFFERENCES UNTIL WE OVERCOME THIS LUNATIC TOGETHER.
HEY, C'MON-- NO TEAM-UPS ALLOWED!
THAT'S RIGHT, KNIGHT--THIS IS A FREE-FOR-ALL! AND STOP CALLING ME SEAN!

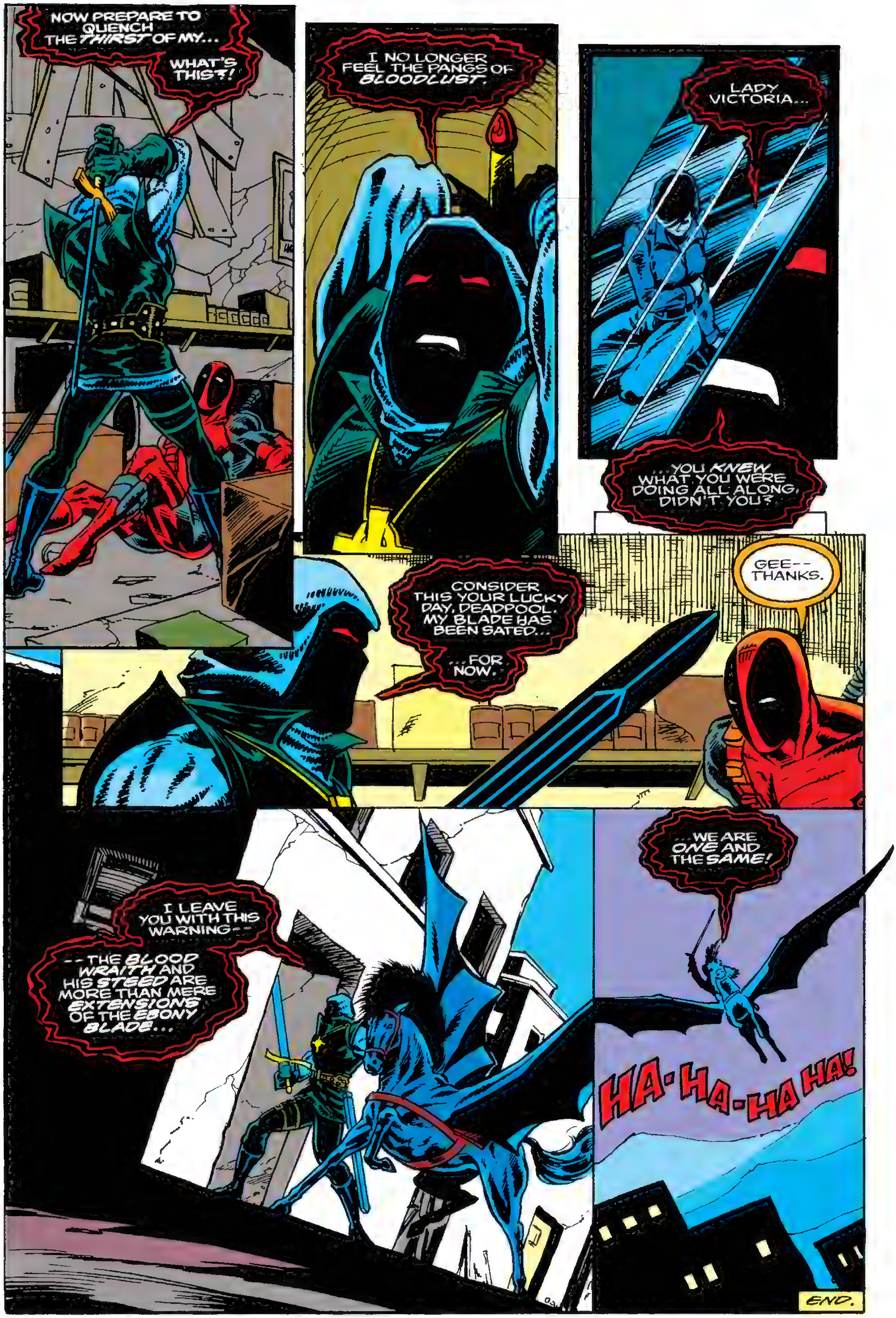

THIS GAME IS *INSANE*.
I'M GOING TO TAKE OUT ONE OF THE PLAYERS...
HGGAAK!
FSHASH
WELL STRUCK, SIR KNIGHT.
NOW, WHILE HE'S PARALYZED, THE *EBONY SWORD* WILL FEAST UPON HIS *SOUL*--!
FSHANG
NO, SEAN...
HNNG!
WUMF
CURSE YE, OLD MAN--DEADPOOL WILL HAVE TO WAIT HIS *TURN*--
WHEN LAST WE CROSSED SWORDS, I PROMISED I WOULD *KILL* YE WHEN NEXT WE MET.
THAT DAY HAS COME.
NO.
DEADPOOL, I TOLD YE TO WAIT YOUR BLEEDIN'--

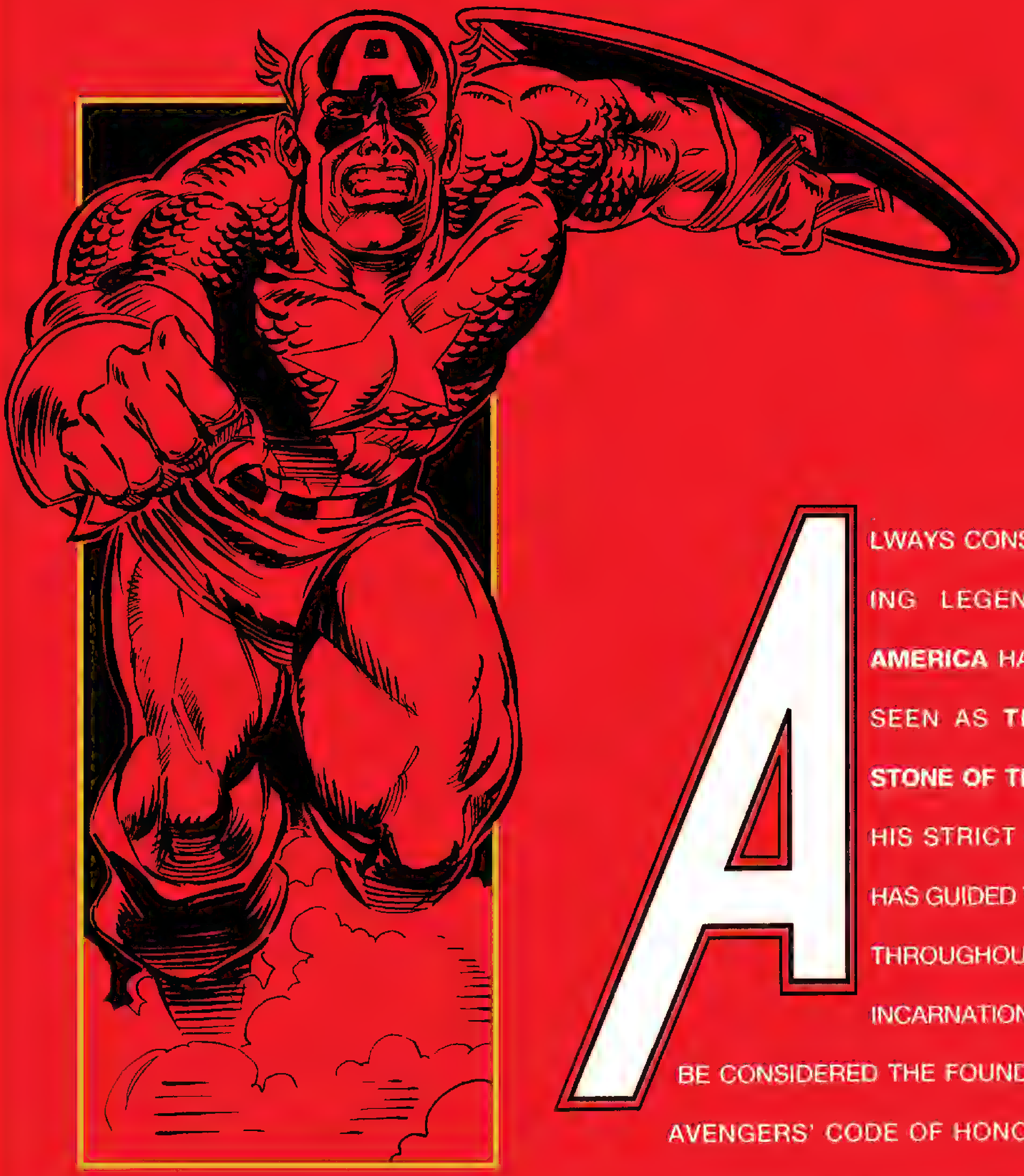

--TURN?
UURRK!!
SEAN?
M-MISS BENTLEY?
VICKI!!!
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO HER?!
I THOUGHT I-- I DINNA KNOW SHE--
NOOO!! COME BACK! IT'S NOT SUPPOSED TO BE LIKE THIS!
PLEASE-- I NEVER WANTED YOUR INNOCENT SOUL...
YOU SON OF A %!#$#-- YOU FINALLY GOT WHAT YOU WERE AFTER!
WHAM
OOMPH!
VICKI.
I'M TRULY
SORRY.


AWW, ISN'T THIS A TOUCHING MOMENT?
I HATE TO SPOIL IT, GENTLEMEN, BUT I'M CLAIMING MY *PRIZE!*
*THIS STORY TAKES PLACE AFTER X-FORCE #15, BUT BEFORE DEADPOOL #1 R.M.
NOW, IF I CAN JUST GET THE *TELEPORTATION MATRIX* IN MY *COSTUME* TO WORK FOR ONCE--
ZZAKTZ
AHHH.
DEADPOOL-- *NO!* YOU CANNA LEAVE WITH THAT--NOT WITH LADY V'S...
ARE YOU HAPPY NOW, SEAN? WE'RE *BOTH* LOSERS.
SIR DANE, YE MUST BELIEVE ME--I...
NO! I WILL *NOT* LET IT END THIS WAY.
VALINOR!!


TO ME, MY FAITHFUL STEED!
PPPRRT
WHOA! EASY, FRIEND. WE HAVE VENGEANCE TO WREAK!
FAREWELL, BOLD KNIGHT!
BE ASSURED THAT I WILL STRIKE A BLOW FOR YE AGAINST OUR MUTUAL FOE.
WRAITH-- YOU CAN BE ASSURED THAT WHEN NEXT WE MEET--
--I WILL KILL YOU!
I LOOK FORWARD TO IT!
FMAB
WHA--?
HE DISAPPEARED! AS THOUGH HE--
--TELEPORTED?


SARAJEVO, YUGOSLAVIA...
NICE PIECE OF WORKMANSHIP.
BUT EVEN THOUGH IT SEEMS TO CONTAIN A LOAD OF POWER--
--IT CAN'T *POSSIBLY* BE THE WEAPON THAT TOLLIVER...
uh-oh.
BWAM
A KICK WELL-DELIVERED, VALINOR!
I WARNED YOU ABOUT THE MYSTICAL *BOND* THAT LINKS ME TO MY *BLADE*, DEADPOOL!
IT ALLOWS ME TO *TRANSPORT* ACROSS *SPACE* AND *TIME* IF I AM SEPARATED FROM IT!


NOW PREPARE TO QUENCH THE *THIRST* OF MY...
WHAT'S THIS?!
I NO LONGER FEEL THE PANGS OF *BLOODLUST*.
LADY VICTORIA...
...YOU *KNEW* WHAT YOU WERE DOING ALL ALONG, DIDN'T YOU?
CONSIDER THIS YOUR LUCKY DAY, DEADPOOL. MY BLADE HAS BEEN SATED...
...FOR NOW.
GEE-- THANKS.
I LEAVE YOU WITH THIS WARNING--
--THE *BLOOD WRAITH* AND HIS *STEED* ARE MORE THAN MERE *EXTENSIONS* OF THE *EBONY BLADE*...
...WE ARE *ONE* AND THE *SAME*!
HA-HA-HA-HA HA!
END.



ALWAYS CONSIDERED A LIVING LEGEND, **CAPTAIN AMERICA** HAS LONG BEEN SEEN AS **THE CORNERSTONE OF THE AVENGERS.** HIS STRICT MORAL CODE HAS GUIDED THE AVENGERS THROUGHOUT THEIR MANY INCARNATIONS, AND COULD BE CONSIDERED THE FOUNDATION OF THE AVENGERS' CODE OF HONOR. FIRST AND FOREMOST IN THIS CODE OF HONOR IS THE TIME-TESTED COMMANDMENT, "**AVENGERS DO NOT KILL.**" OR DO THEY? WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THEM NOW THAT THE CREED HAS BEEN BROKEN? WILL THEY EMBRACE TACTICS AS BRUTAL AS THE FORCES THEY OPPOSE? ***HAVE THE AVENGERS BECOME A GROUP THAT HAS OUTGROWN EVEN THE LEADERSHIP OF CAPTAIN AMERICA?***

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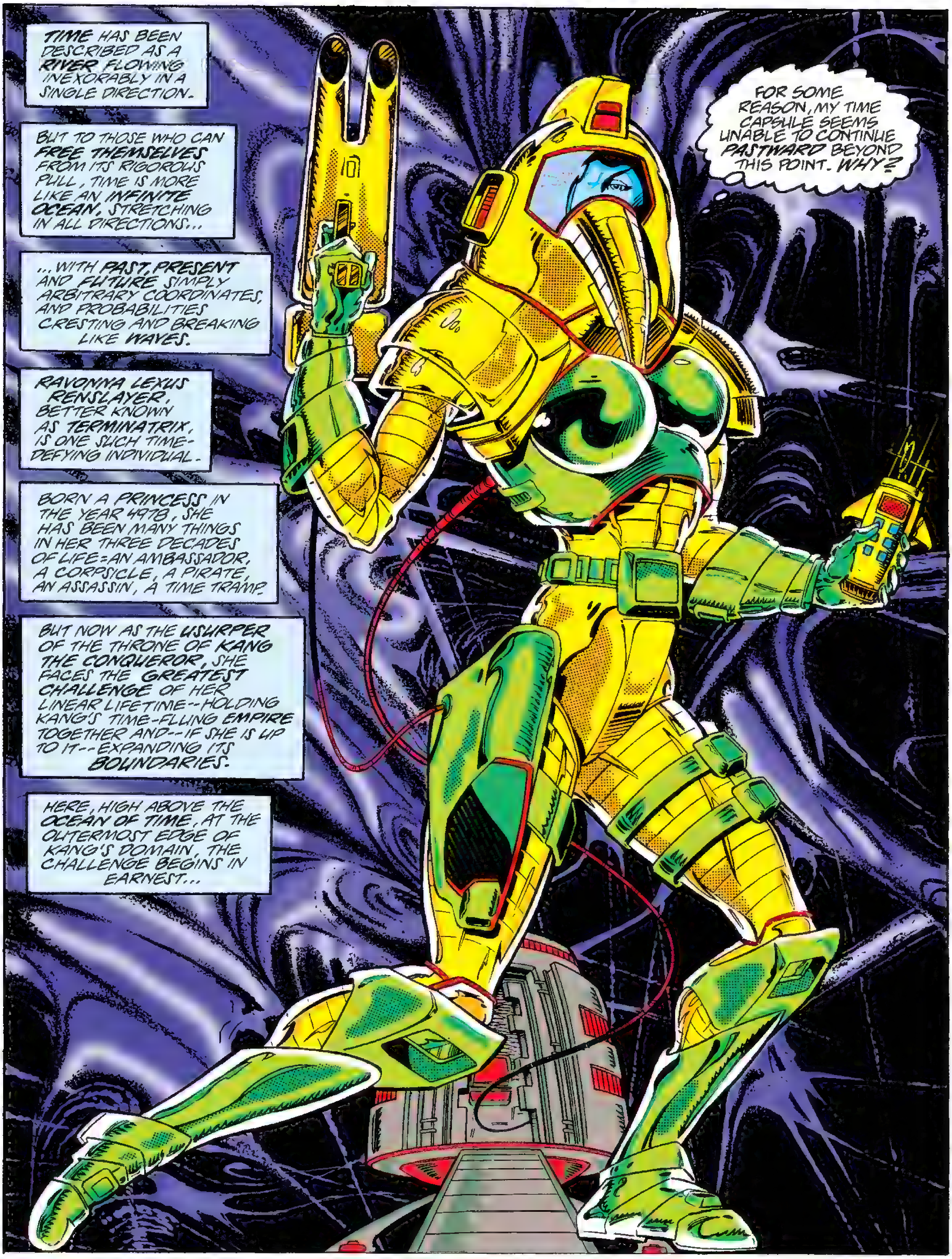
GUSTOVICH/93
...OUT OF TIME!

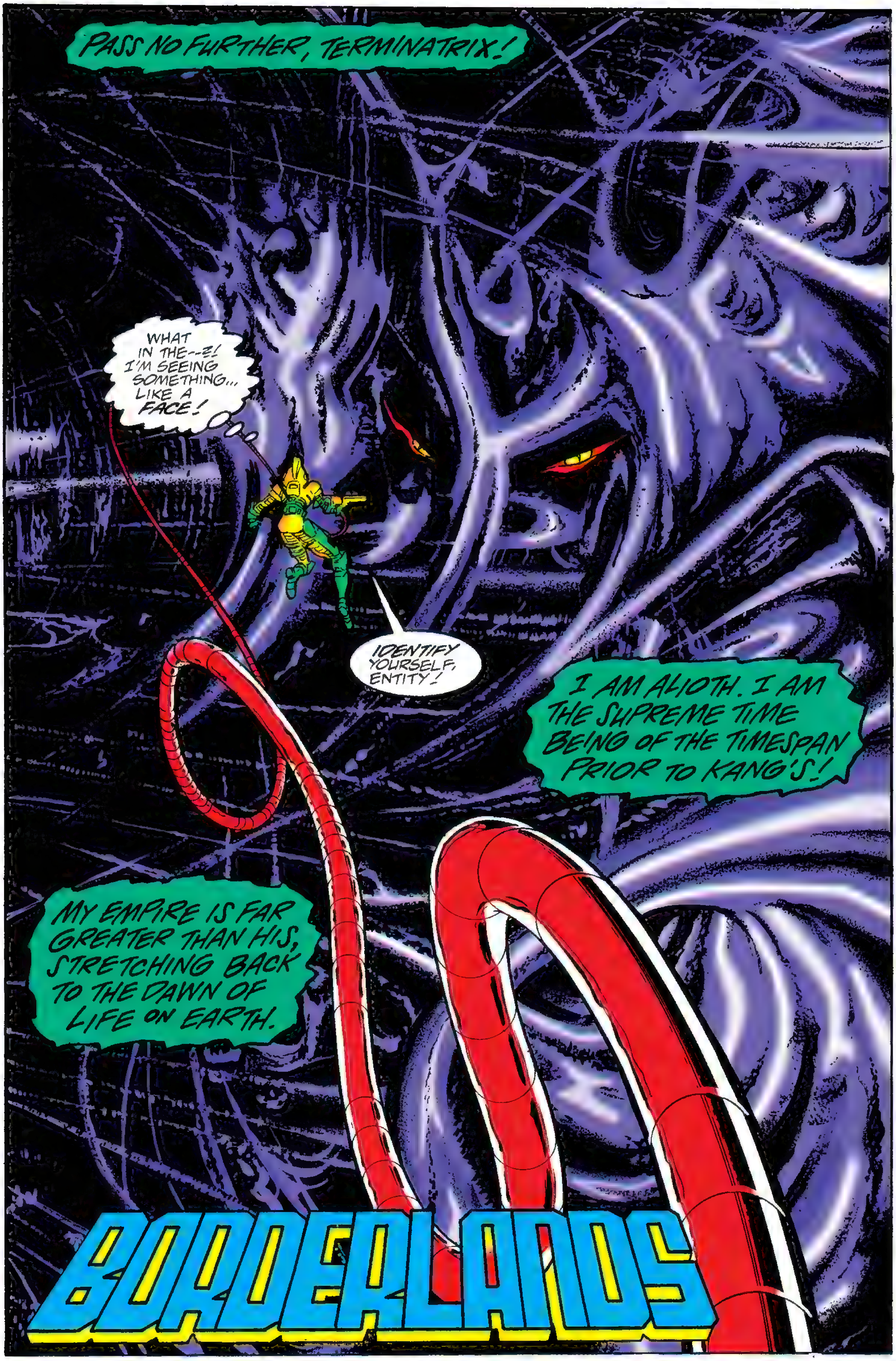

TIME HAS BEEN DESCRIBED AS A RIVER FLOWING INEXORABLY IN A SINGLE DIRECTION.
BUT TO THOSE WHO CAN FREE THEMSELVES FROM ITS RIGOROUS PULL, TIME IS MORE LIKE AN INFINITE OCEAN, STRETCHING IN ALL DIRECTIONS...
...WITH PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE SIMPLY ARBITRARY COORDINATES, AND PROBABILITIES CRESTING AND BREAKING LIKE WAVES.
RAVONNA LEXUS RENSLAYER, BETTER KNOWN AS TERMINATRIX, IS ONE SUCH TIME-DEFYING INDIVIDUAL.
BORN A PRINCESS IN THE YEAR 4978, SHE HAS BEEN MANY THINGS IN HER THREE DECADES OF LIFE: AN AMBASSADOR, A CORPSICLE, A PIRATE, AN ASSASSIN, A TIME TRAMP.
BUT NOW AS THE USURPER OF THE THRONE OF KANG THE CONQUEROR, SHE FACES THE GREATEST CHALLENGE OF HER LINEAR LIFETIME--HOLDING KANG'S TIME-FLUNG EMPIRE TOGETHER AND--IF SHE IS UP TO IT--EXPANDING ITS BOUNDARIES.
HERE, HIGH ABOVE THE OCEAN OF TIME, AT THE OUTERMOST EDGE OF KANG'S DOMAIN, THE CHALLENGE BEGINS IN EARNEST...
FOR SOME REASON, MY TIME CAPSULE SEEMS UNABLE TO CONTINUE PASTWARD BEYOND THIS POINT. WHY?

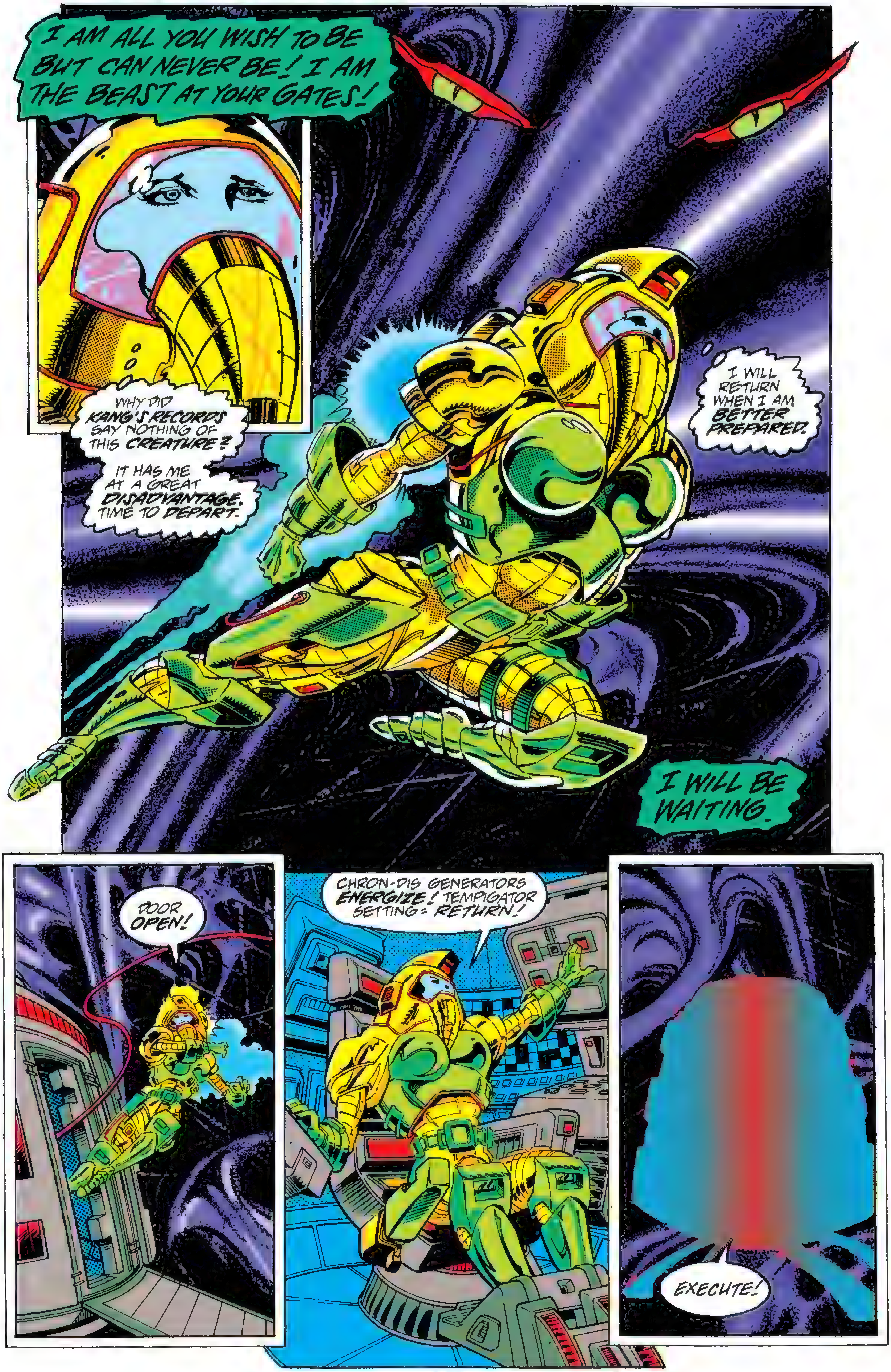
A TIME-TOSSED TALE TOLD BY...

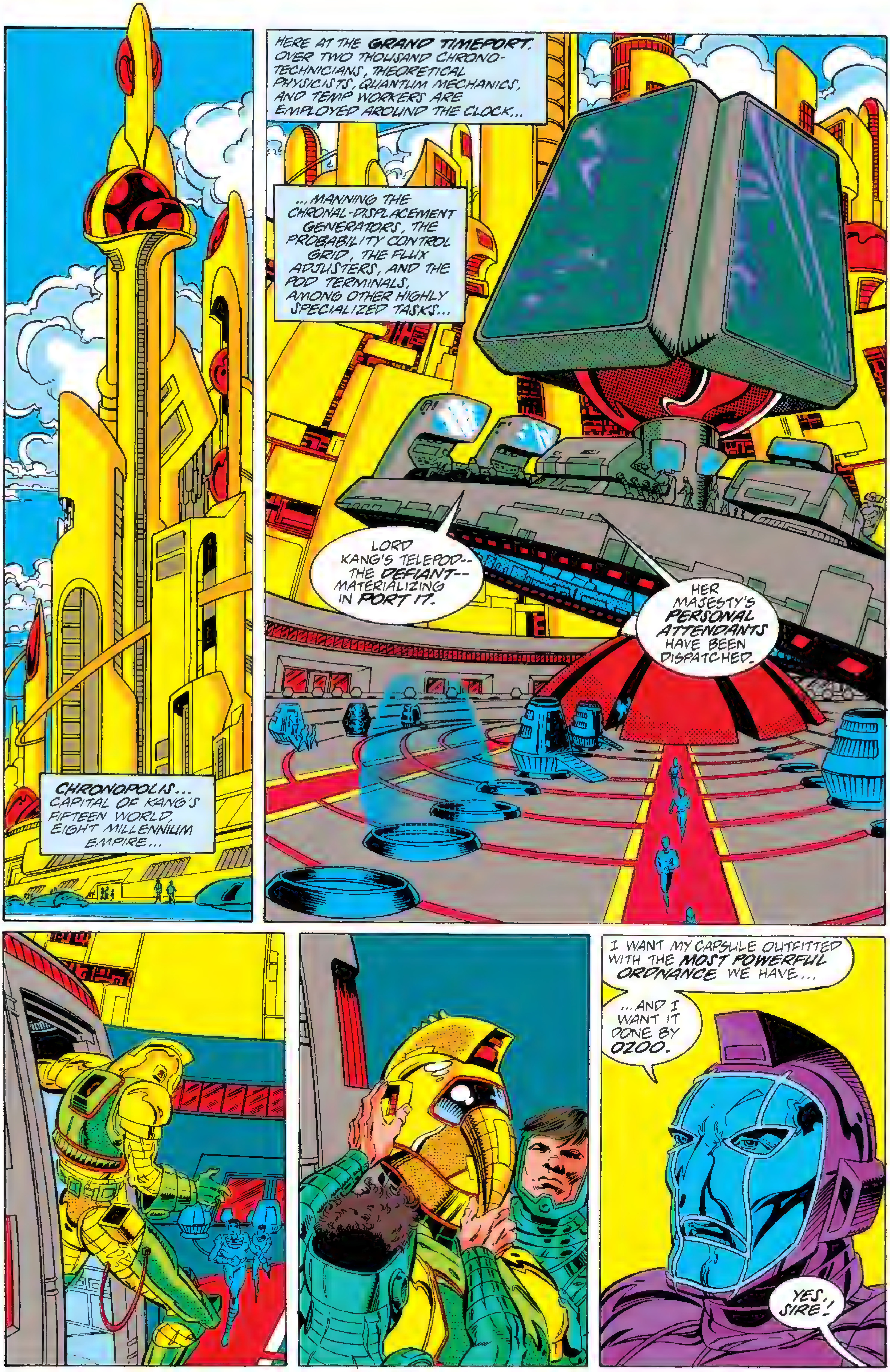
MARK GRUENWALD WRITER · MIKE GUSTOVICH PENCILER · BUD LAROSA INKER · STEVE DUTRO LETTERER

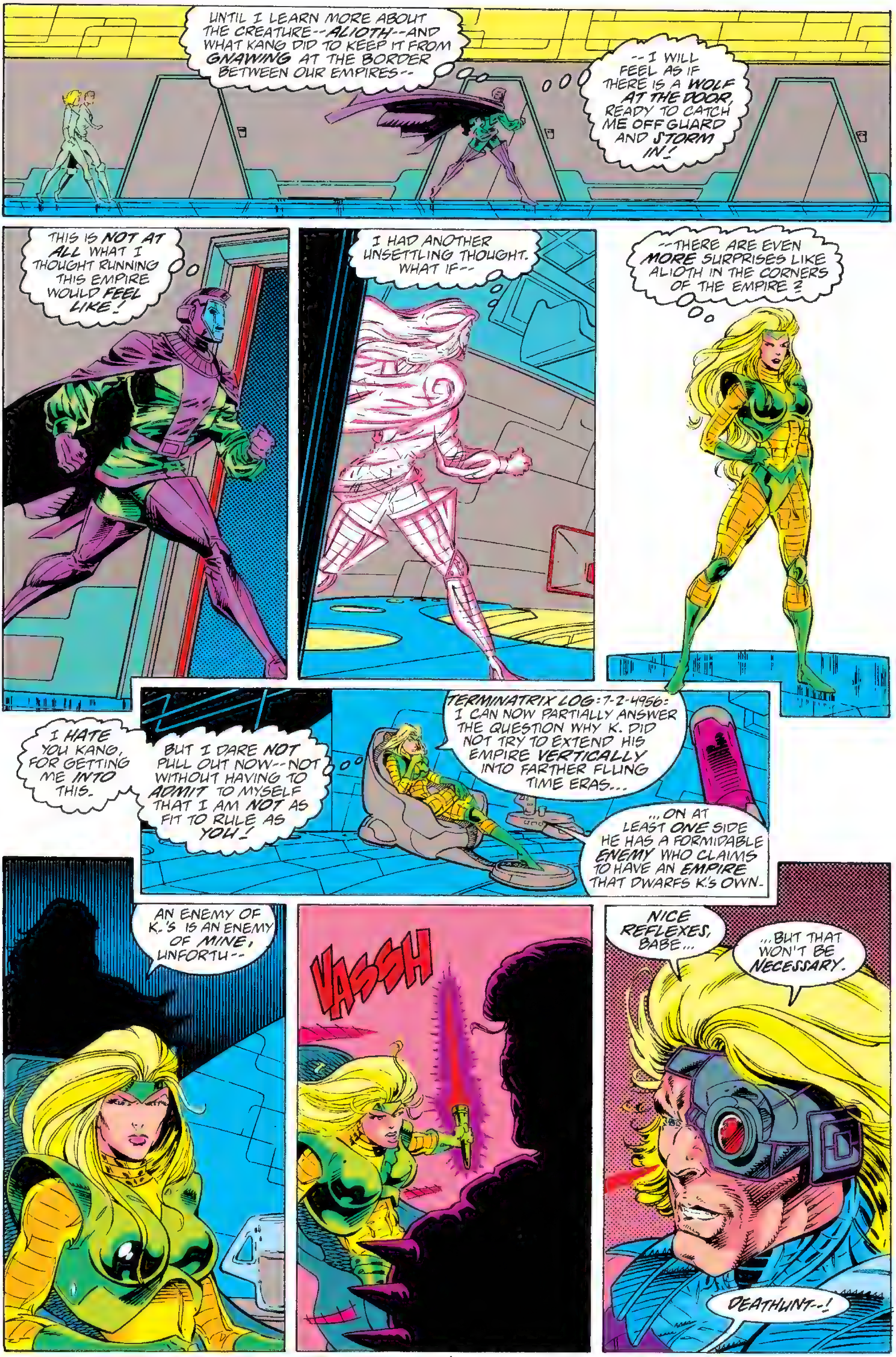
CHRIS MATTHYS COLORIST · PAT GARRAHY ASST. EDITOR · RALPH MACCHIO EDITOR · TOM DEFALCO EDITERMINATOR

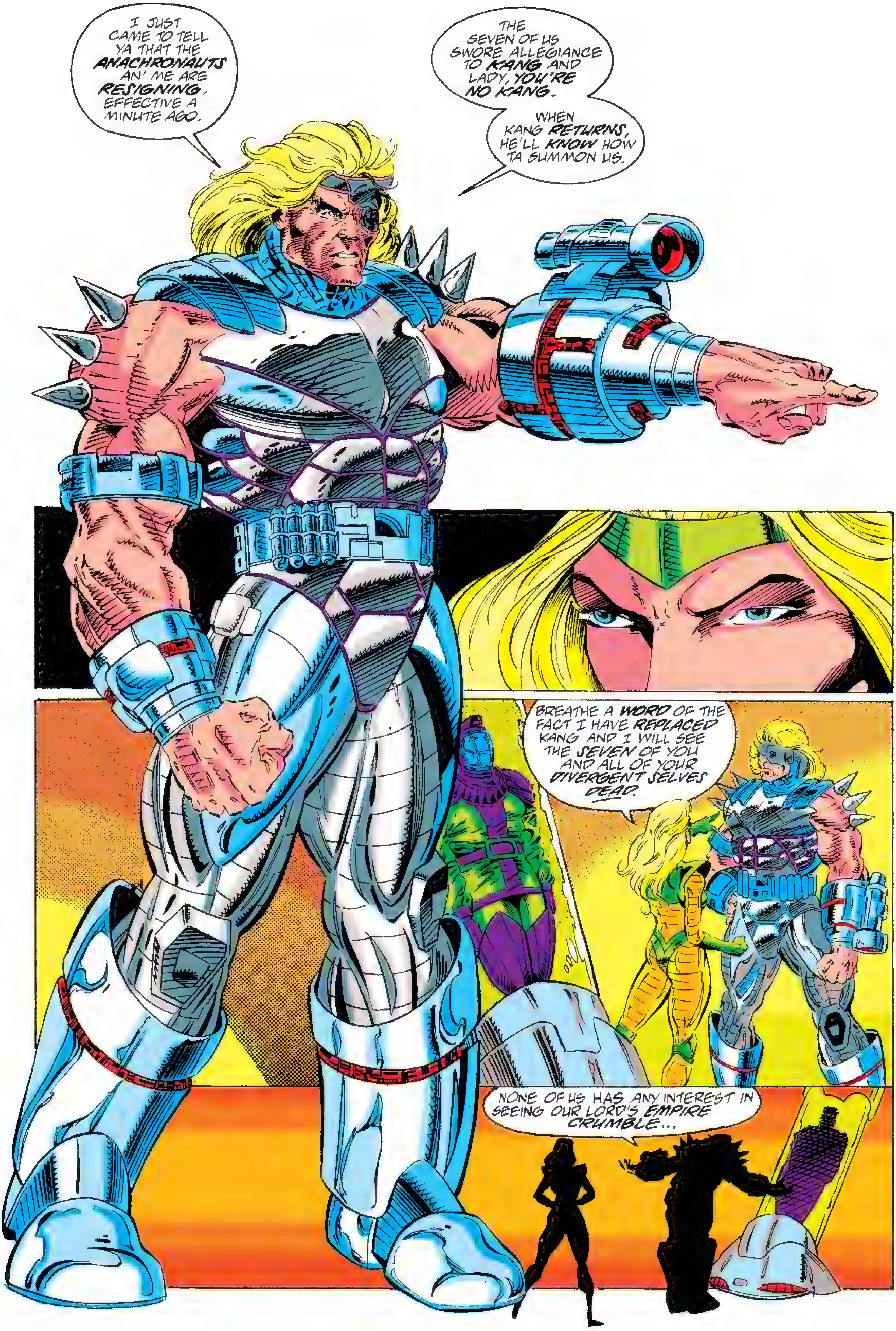
MAYBE OUT HERE IN MY TEMPARMOR, I CAN DETERMINE IF THE PROBLEM IS A MALFUNCTION IN THE CAPSULE-
--OR SOME ANOMALY IN THE LOCAL SPACE/TIME.
THAT'S BIZARRE. IF MY INSTRUMENTS CAN BE BELIEVED, THERE IS SOME SORT OF... ENERGY FIELD-- A BARRIER HERE.
A TIME BARRIER? IS THIS SOMEONE'S IDEA OF A JOKE?
IT ISN'T MINE.
LET'S SEE WHAT A 10-SETTING ON THE KURTZBERG WARP CANNON WILL DO!
VWORR
UH!

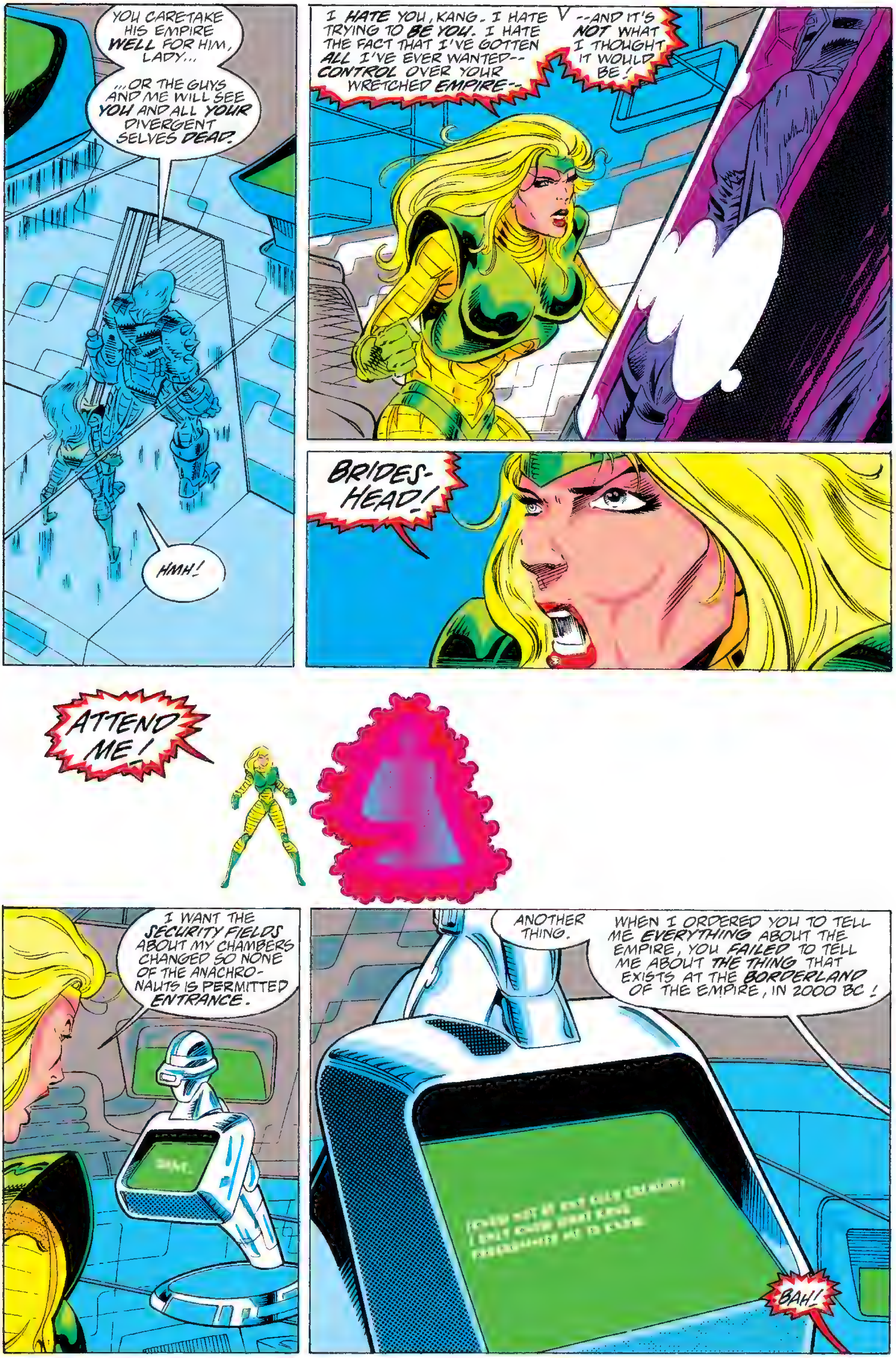

PASS NO FURTHER, TERMINATRIX!
WHAT IN THE--?! I'M SEEING SOMETHING... LIKE A FACE!
IDENTIFY YOURSELF, ENTITY!
I AM ALIOTH. I AM THE SUPREME TIME BEING OF THE TIMESPAN PRIOR TO KANG'S!
MY EMPIRE IS FAR GREATER THAN HIS, STRETCHING BACK TO THE DAWN OF LIFE ON EARTH.
BORDERLANDS

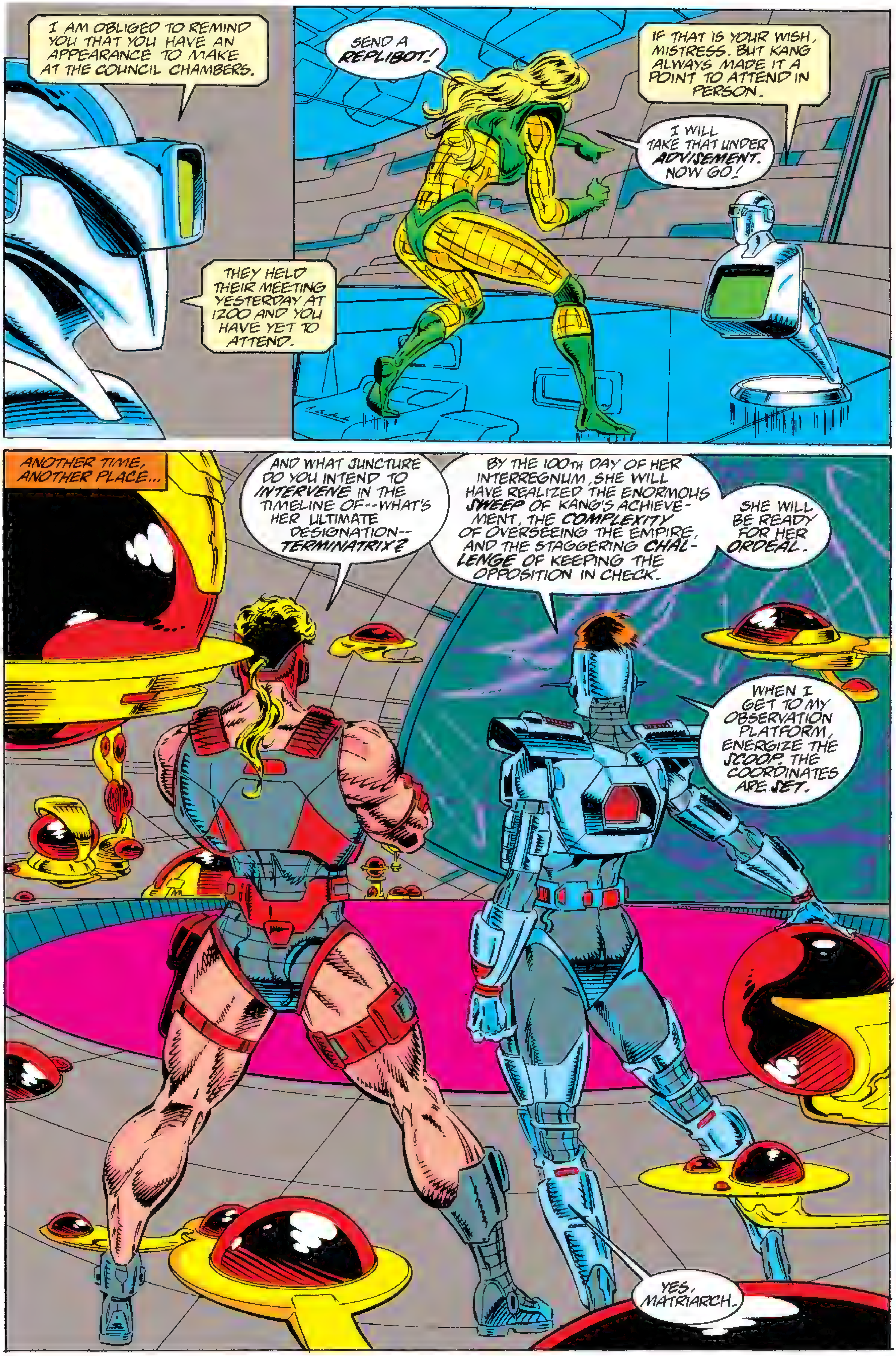

I AM ALL YOU WISH TO BE BUT CAN NEVER BE! I AM THE BEAST AT YOUR GATES!
WHY DID KANG'S RECORDS SAY NOTHING OF THIS CREATURE?
IT HAS ME AT A GREAT DISADVANTAGE. TIME TO DEPART.
I WILL RETURN WHEN I AM BETTER PREPARED.
I WILL BE WAITING.
DOOR OPEN!
CHRON-DIS GENERATORS ENERGIZE! TEMPIGATOR SETTING - RETURN!
EXECUTE!

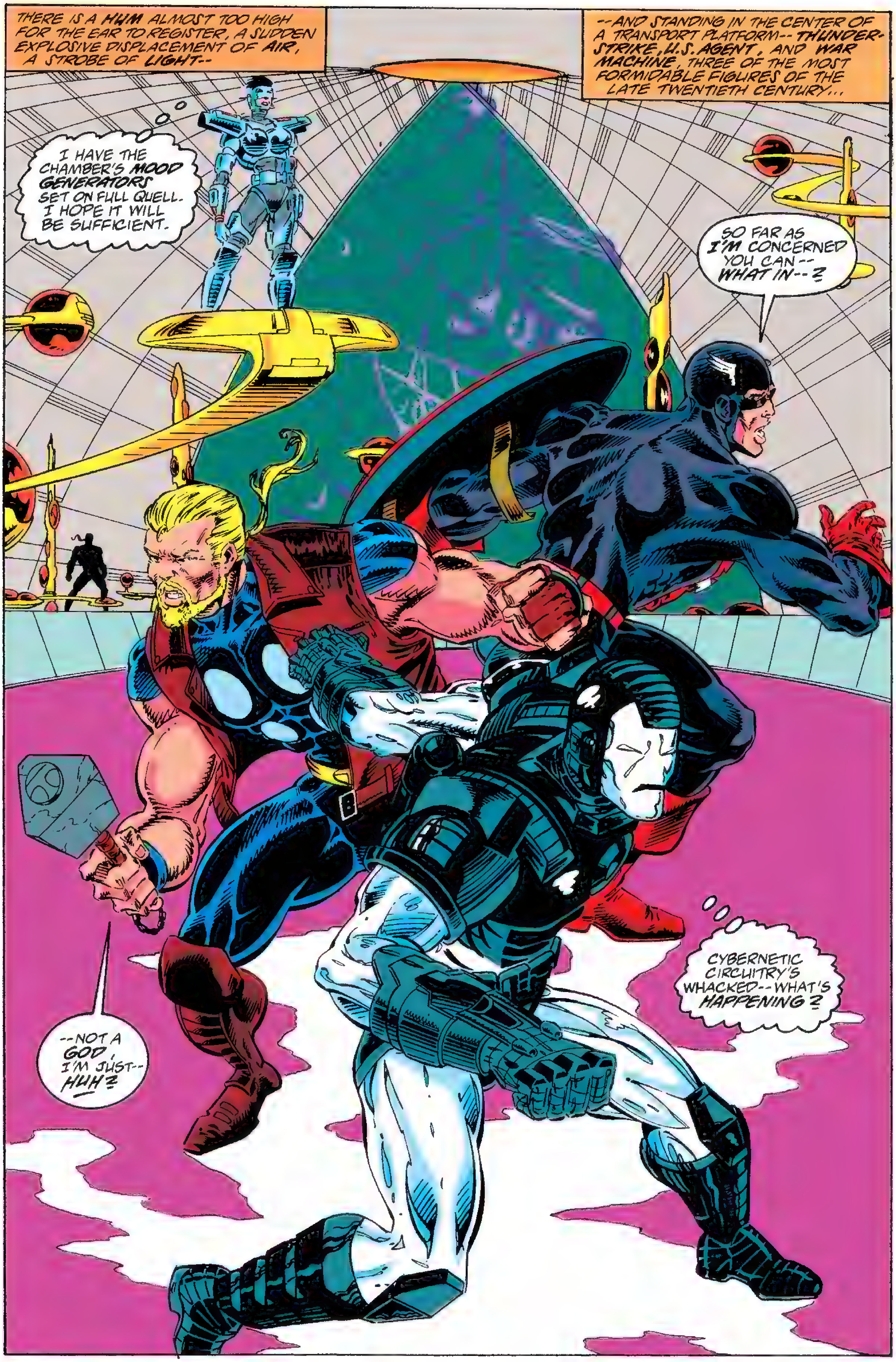

CHRONOPOLIS... CAPITAL OF KANG'S FIFTEEN WORLD, EIGHT MILLENNIUM EMPIRE...
HERE AT THE GRAND TIMEPORT, OVER TWO THOUSAND CHRONO-TECHNICIANS, THEORETICAL PHYSICISTS, QUANTUM MECHANICS, AND TEMP WORKERS ARE EMPLOYED AROUND THE CLOCK...
...MANNING THE CHRONAL-DISPLACEMENT GENERATORS, THE PROBABILITY CONTROL GRID, THE FLUX ADJUSTERS, AND THE POD TERMINALS, AMONG OTHER HIGHLY SPECIALIZED TASKS...
LORD KANG'S TELEPOD-- THE DEFIANT-- MATERIALIZING IN PORT 17.
HER MAJESTY'S PERSONAL ATTENDANTS HAVE BEEN DISPATCHED.
I WANT MY CAPSULE OUTFITTED WITH THE MOST POWERFUL ORDNANCE WE HAVE...
...AND I WANT IT DONE BY 0200.
YES, SIRE!

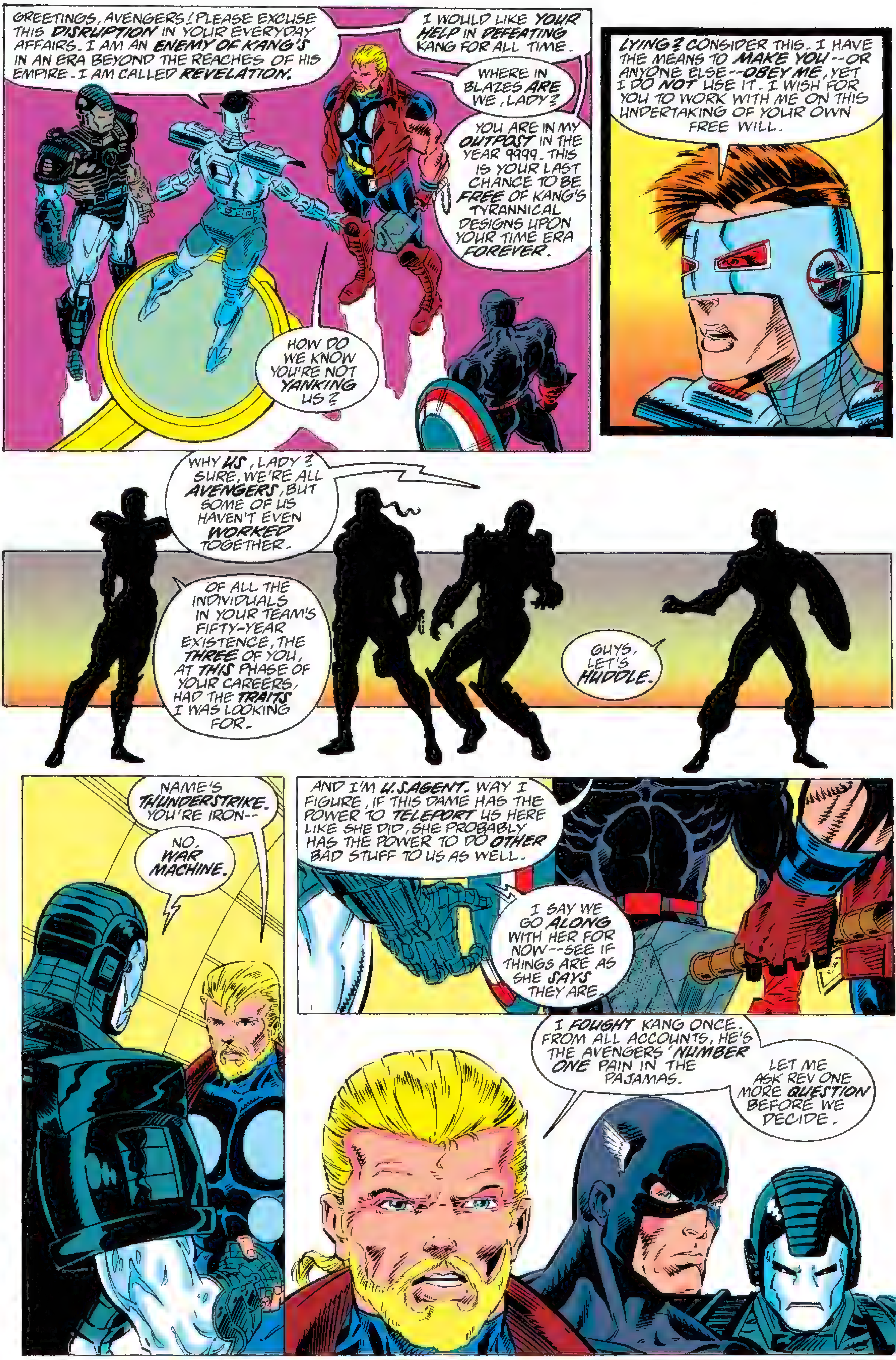

UNTIL I LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CREATURE--ALIOTH--AND WHAT KANG DID TO KEEP IT FROM GNAWING AT THE BORDER BETWEEN OUR EMPIRES--
--I WILL FEEL AS IF THERE IS A WOLF AT THE DOOR, READY TO CATCH ME OFF GUARD AND STORM IN!
THIS IS NOT AT ALL WHAT I THOUGHT RUNNING THIS EMPIRE WOULD FEEL LIKE!
I HAD ANOTHER UNSETTLING THOUGHT. WHAT IF--
--THERE ARE EVEN MORE SURPRISES LIKE ALIOTH IN THE CORNERS OF THE EMPIRE?
I HATE YOU KANG, FOR GETTING ME INTO THIS.
BUT I DARE NOT PULL OUT NOW--NOT WITHOUT HAVING TO ADMIT TO MYSELF THAT I AM NOT AS FIT TO RULE AS YOU!
TERMINATRIX LOG: 7-2-4956: I CAN NOW PARTIALLY ANSWER THE QUESTION WHY K. DID NOT TRY TO EXTEND HIS EMPIRE VERTICALLY INTO FARTHER FLUNG TIME ERAS...
...ON AT LEAST ONE SIDE HE HAS A FORMIDABLE ENEMY WHO CLAIMS TO HAVE AN EMPIRE THAT DWARFS K.'S OWN.
AN ENEMY OF K.'S IS AN ENEMY OF MINE, UNFORTU--
VASSH
NICE REFLEXES, BABE...
...BUT THAT WON'T BE NECESSARY.
DEATHUNT--!

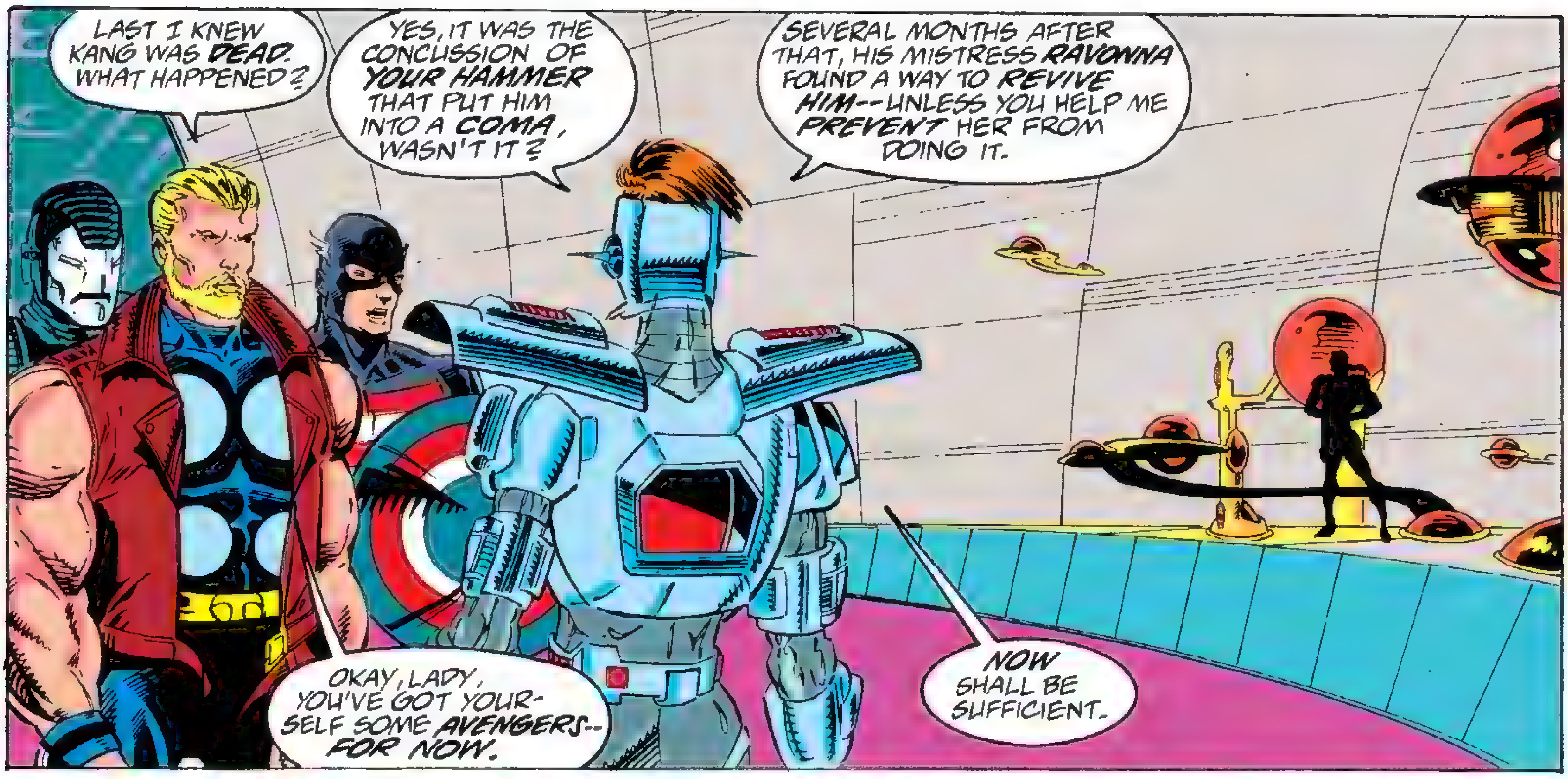

I JUST CAME TO TELL YA THAT THE ANACHRONAUTS AN' ME ARE RESIGNING, EFFECTIVE A MINUTE AGO.
THE SEVEN OF US SWORE ALLEGIANCE TO KANG AND LADY, YOU'RE NO KANG.
WHEN KANG RETURNS, HE'LL KNOW HOW TA SUMMON US.
BREATHE A WORD OF THE FACT I HAVE REPLACED KANG AND I WILL SEE THE SEVEN OF YOU AND ALL OF YOUR DIVERGENT SELVES DEAD.
NONE OF US HAS ANY INTEREST IN SEEING OUR LORD'S EMPIRE CRUMBLE...

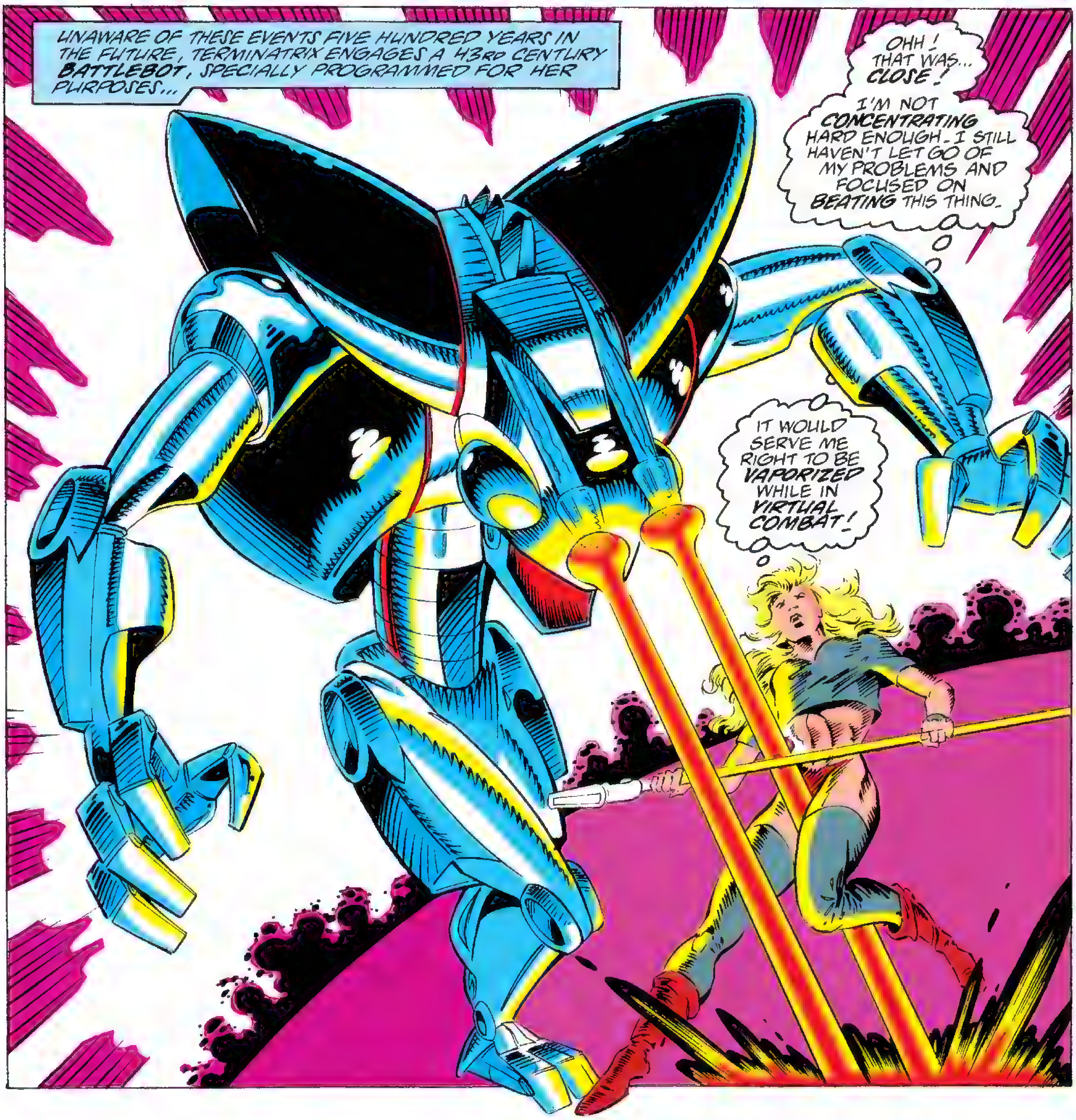

YOU CARETAKE HIS EMPIRE WELL FOR HIM, LADY...
...OR THE GUYS AND ME WILL SEE YOU AND ALL YOUR DIVERGENT SELVES DEAD.
HMH!
I HATE YOU, KANG. I HATE TRYING TO BE YOU. I HATE THE FACT THAT I'VE GOTTEN ALL I'VE EVER WANTED-- CONTROL OVER YOUR WRETCHED EMPIRE--
--AND IT'S NOT WHAT I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE!
BRIDES-HEAD!
ATTEND ME!
I WANT THE SECURITY FIELDS ABOUT MY CHAMBERS CHANGED SO NONE OF THE ANACHRO-NAUTS IS PERMITTED ENTRANCE.
ANOTHER THING.
WHEN I ORDERED YOU TO TELL ME EVERYTHING ABOUT THE EMPIRE, YOU FAILED TO TELL ME ABOUT THE THING THAT EXISTS AT THE BORDERLAND OF THE EMPIRE, IN 2000 BC!
BAH!

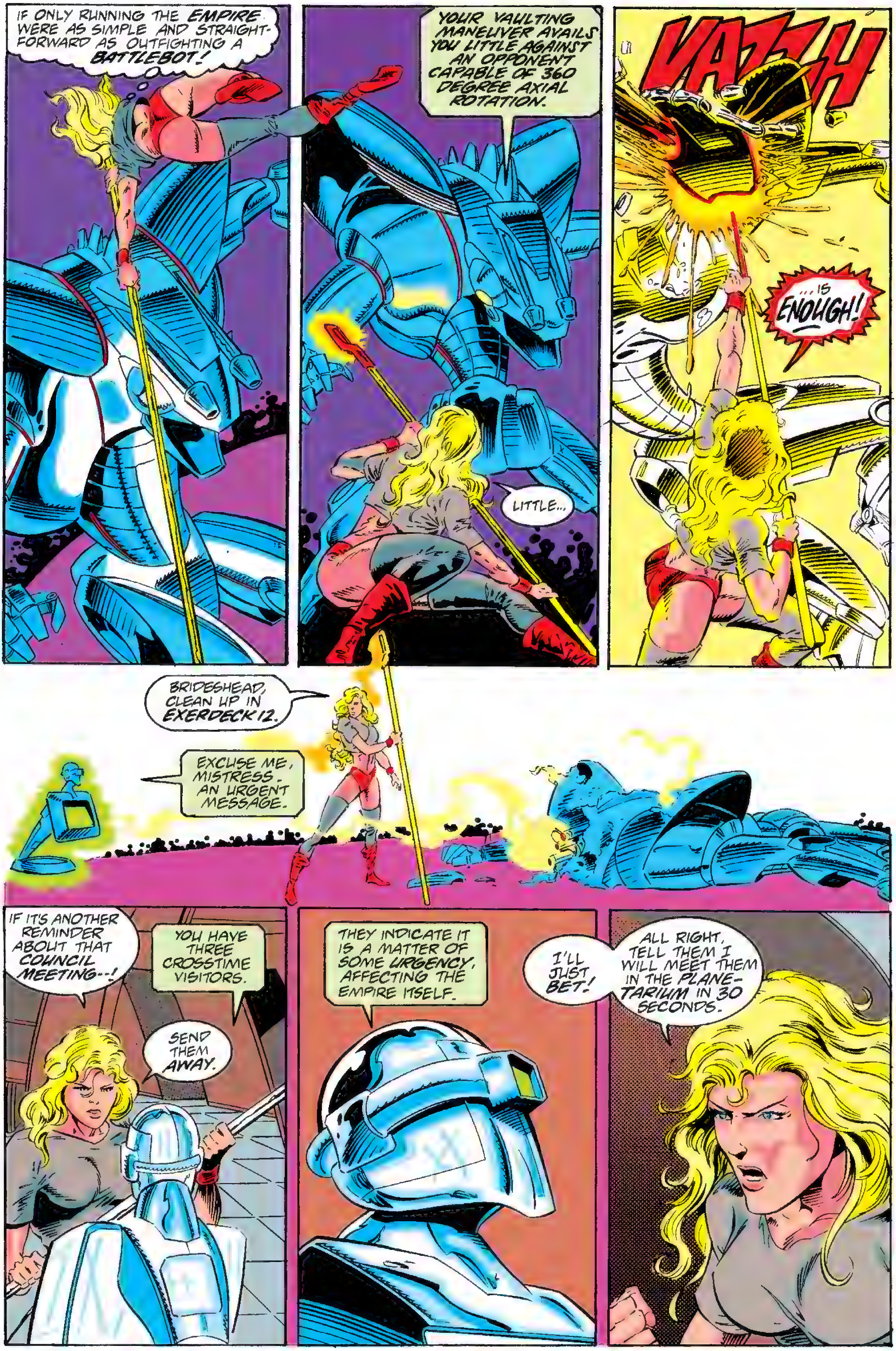

I AM OBLIGED TO REMIND YOU THAT YOU HAVE AN APPEARANCE TO MAKE AT THE COUNCIL CHAMBERS.
THEY HELD THEIR MEETING YESTERDAY AT 1200 AND YOU HAVE YET TO ATTEND.
SEND A **REPLIBOT!**
IF THAT IS YOUR WISH, MISTRESS. BUT KANG ALWAYS MADE IT A POINT TO ATTEND IN PERSON.
I WILL TAKE THAT UNDER **ADVISEMENT.** NOW GO!
ANOTHER TIME, ANOTHER PLACE...
AND WHAT JUNCTURE DO YOU INTEND TO **INTERVENE** IN THE TIMELINE OF--WHAT'S HER ULTIMATE DESIGNATION--**TERMINATRIX?**
BY THE 100TH DAY OF HER INTERREGNUM, SHE WILL HAVE REALIZED THE ENORMOUS **SWEEP** OF KANG'S ACHIEVEMENT, THE **COMPLEXITY** OF OVERSEEING THE EMPIRE, AND THE STAGGERING **CHALLENGE** OF KEEPING THE OPPOSITION IN CHECK.
SHE WILL BE READY FOR HER **ORDEAL.**
WHEN I GET TO MY OBSERVATION PLATFORM, ENERGIZE THE **SCOOP.** THE COORDINATES ARE **SET.**
YES, MATRIARCH.

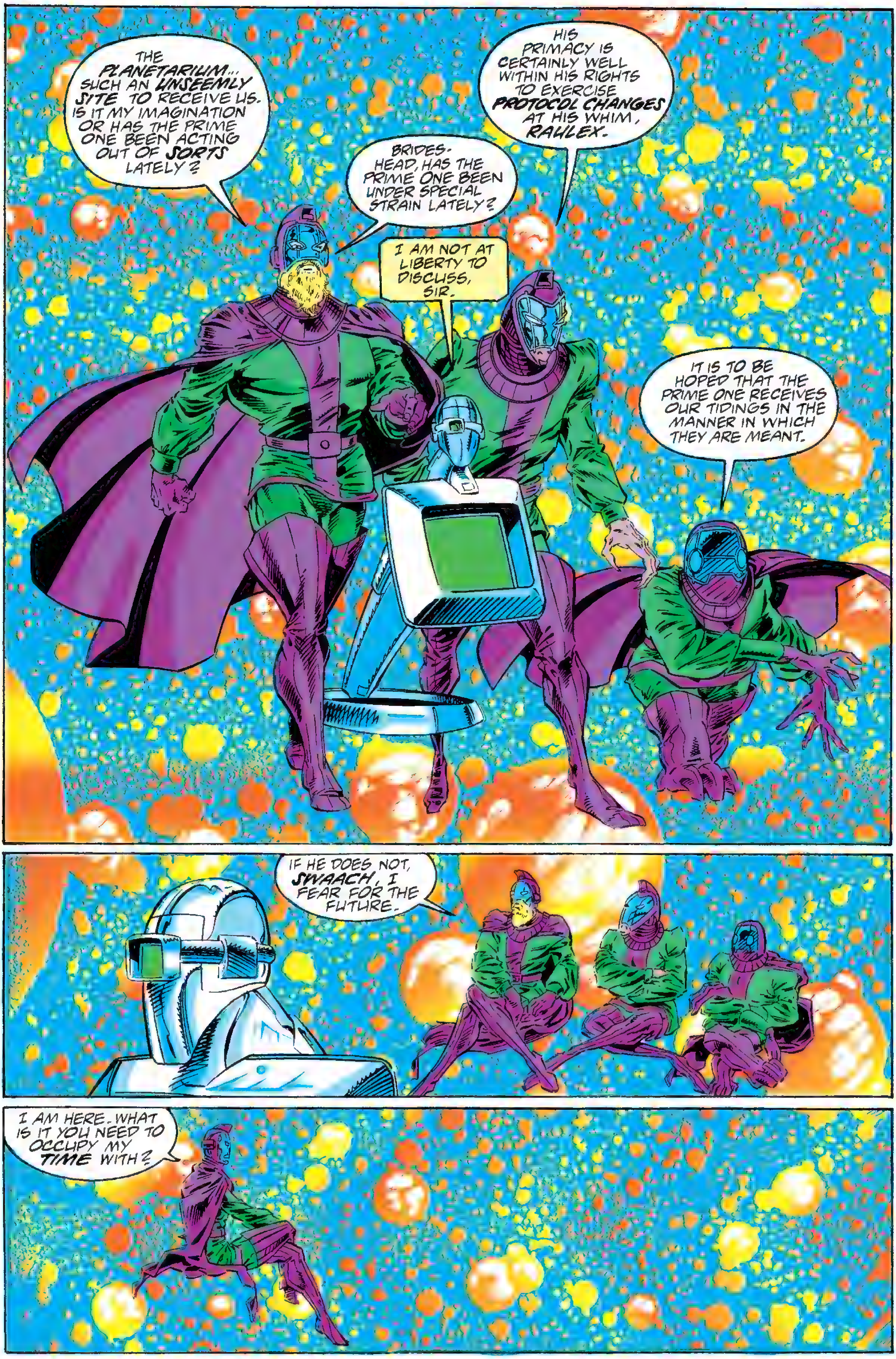

THERE IS A **HUM** ALMOST TOO HIGH FOR THE EAR TO REGISTER, A SUDDEN EXPLOSIVE DISPLACEMENT OF **AIR**, A STROBE OF **LIGHT**--
--AND STANDING IN THE CENTER OF A TRANSPORT PLATFORM-- **THUNDERSTRIKE, U.S. AGENT**, AND **WAR MACHINE**, THREE OF THE MOST FORMIDABLE FIGURES OF THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY...
I HAVE THE CHAMBER'S **MOOD GENERATORS** SET ON FULL QUELL. I HOPE IT WILL BE SUFFICIENT.
SO FAR AS **I'M** CONCERNED YOU CAN-- **WHAT IN--?**
CYBERNETIC CIRCUITRY'S WHACKED--WHAT'S **HAPPENING?**
--NOT A **GOD**, I'M JUST-- **HUH?**

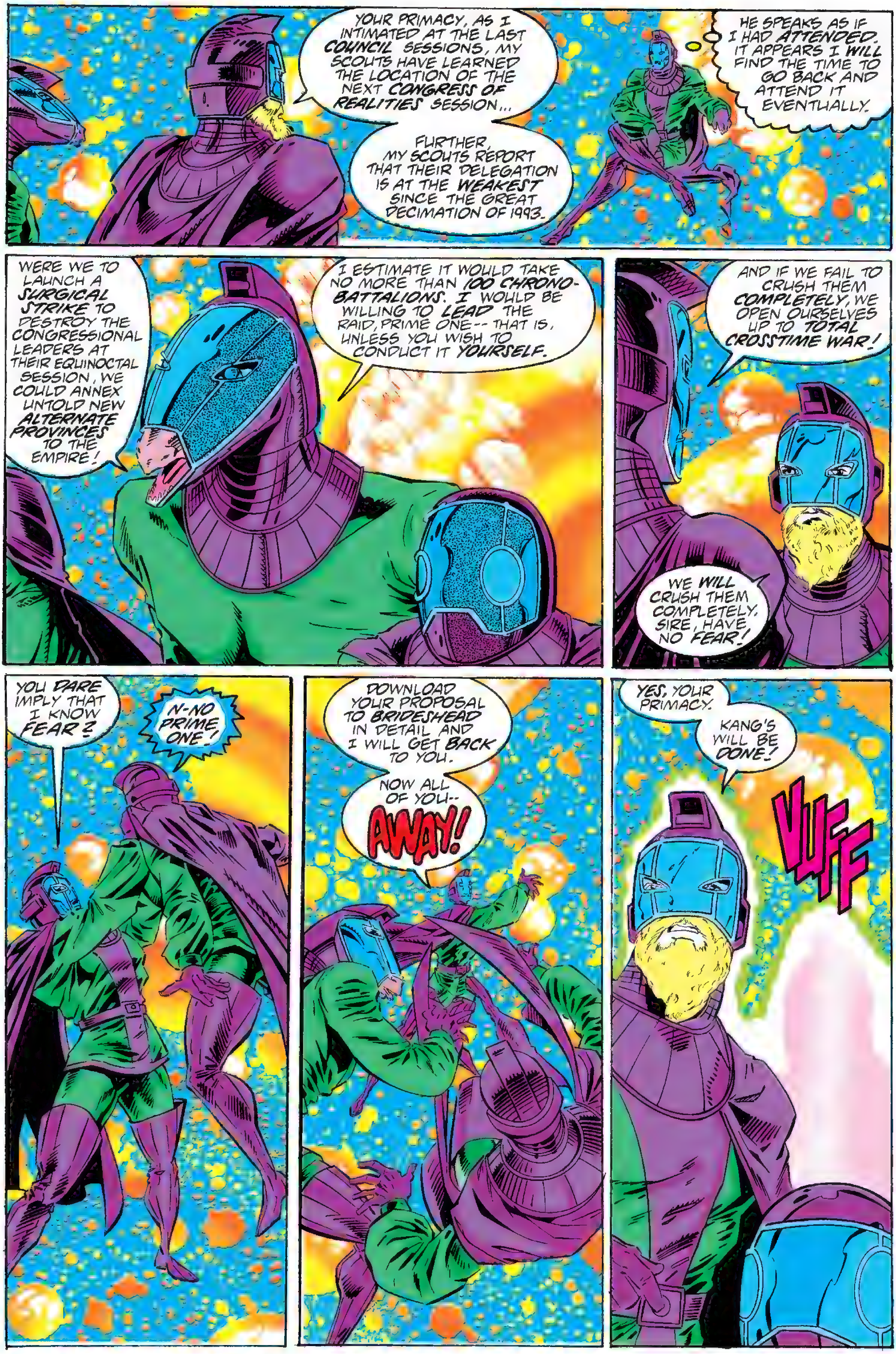

GREETINGS, AVENGERS! PLEASE EXCUSE THIS DISRUPTION IN YOUR EVERYDAY AFFAIRS. I AM AN ENEMY OF KANG'S IN AN ERA BEYOND THE REACHES OF HIS EMPIRE. I AM CALLED REVELATION.
I WOULD LIKE YOUR HELP IN DEFEATING KANG FOR ALL TIME.
WHERE IN BLAZES ARE WE, LADY?
YOU ARE IN MY OUTPOST IN THE YEAR 9999. THIS IS YOUR LAST CHANCE TO BE FREE OF KANG'S TYRANNICAL DESIGNS UPON YOUR TIME ERA FOREVER.
HOW DO WE KNOW YOU'RE NOT YANKING US?
LYING? CONSIDER THIS. I HAVE THE MEANS TO MAKE YOU--OR ANYONE ELSE--OBEY ME, YET I DO NOT USE IT. I WISH FOR YOU TO WORK WITH ME ON THIS UNDERTAKING OF YOUR OWN FREE WILL.
WHY US, LADY? SURE, WE'RE ALL AVENGERS, BUT SOME OF US HAVEN'T EVEN WORKED TOGETHER.
OF ALL THE INDIVIDUALS IN YOUR TEAM'S FIFTY-YEAR EXISTENCE, THE THREE OF YOU, AT THIS PHASE OF YOUR CAREERS, HAD THE TRAITS I WAS LOOKING FOR.
GUYS, LET'S HUDDLE.
NAME'S THUNDERSTRIKE. YOU'RE IRON--
NO. WAR MACHINE.
AND I'M U.S.AGENT. WAY I FIGURE, IF THIS DAME HAS THE POWER TO TELEPORT US HERE LIKE SHE DID, SHE PROBABLY HAS THE POWER TO DO OTHER BAD STUFF TO US AS WELL.
I SAY WE GO ALONG WITH HER FOR NOW--SEE IF THINGS ARE AS SHE SAYS THEY ARE.
I FOUGHT KANG ONCE. FROM ALL ACCOUNTS, HE'S THE AVENGERS' NUMBER ONE PAIN IN THE PAJAMAS.
LET ME ASK REV ONE MORE QUESTION BEFORE WE DECIDE.

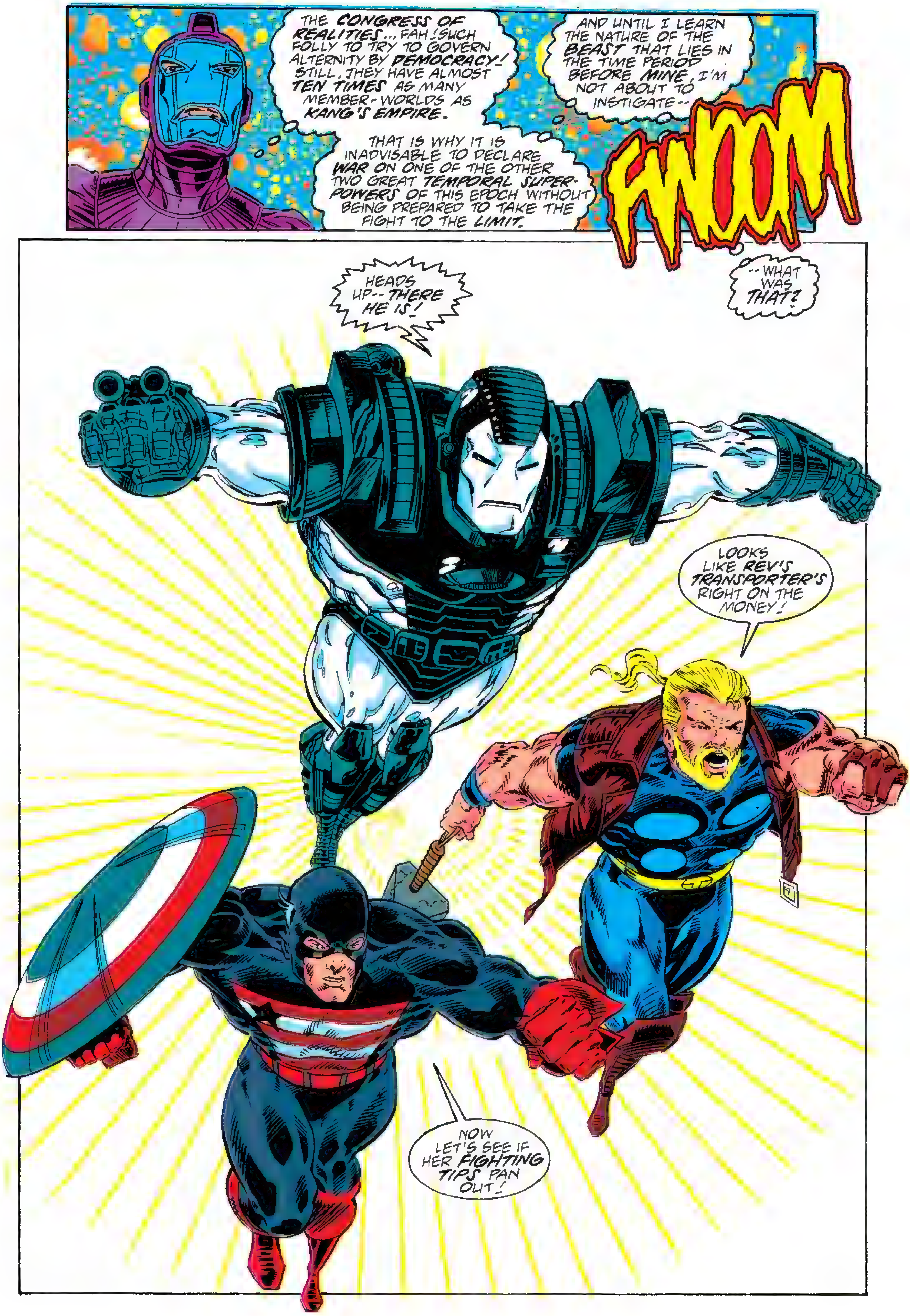

LAST I KNEW KANG WAS DEAD. WHAT HAPPENED?
YES, IT WAS THE CONCUSSION OF YOUR HAMMER THAT PUT HIM INTO A COMA, WASN'T IT?
SEVERAL MONTHS AFTER THAT, HIS MISTRESS RAVONNA FOUND A WAY TO REVIVE HIM-- UNLESS YOU HELP ME PREVENT HER FROM DOING IT.
OKAY, LADY, YOU'VE GOT YOURSELF SOME AVENGERS-- FOR NOW.
NOW SHALL BE SUFFICIENT.

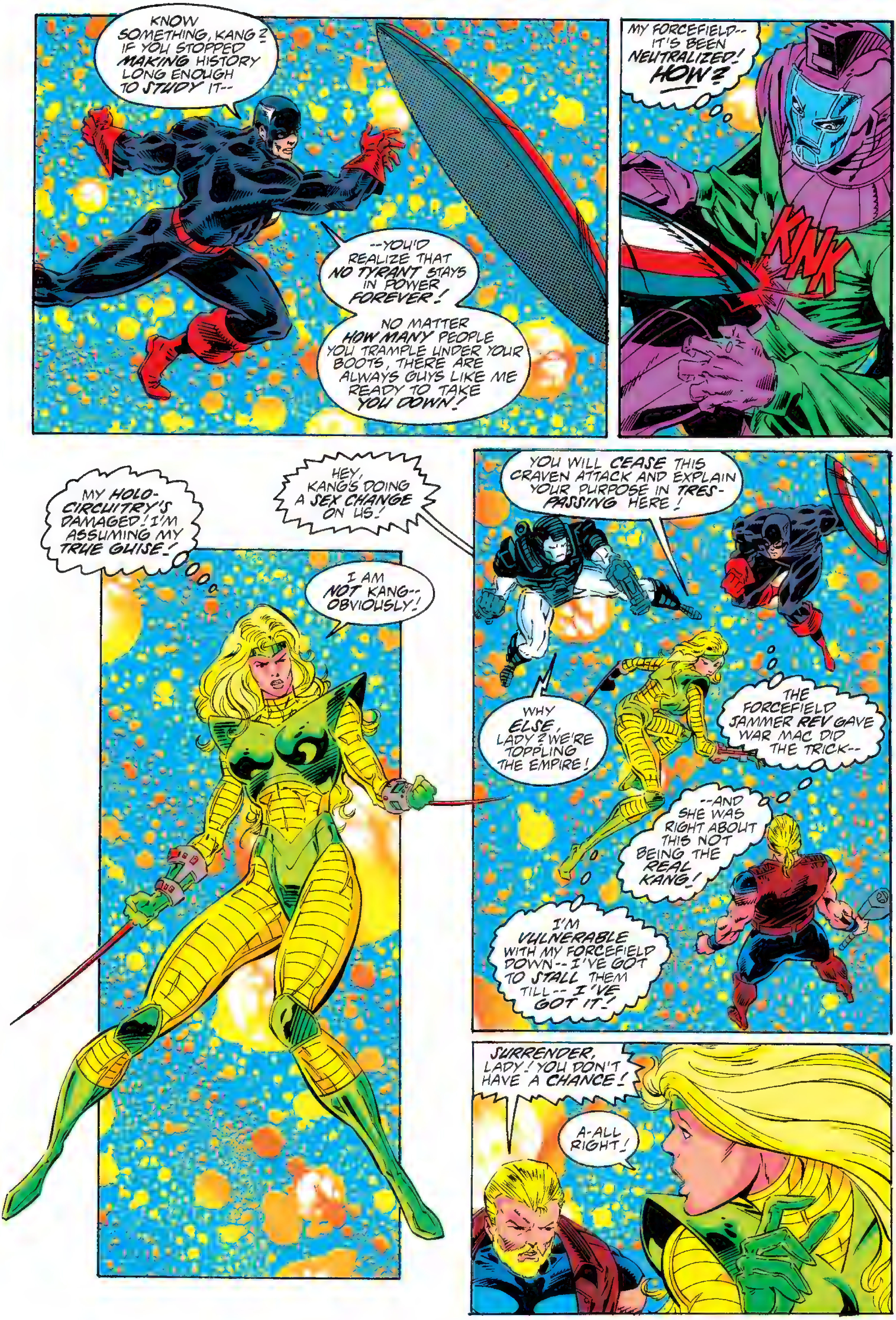

UNAWARE OF THESE EVENTS FIVE HUNDRED YEARS IN THE FUTURE, TERMINATRIX ENGAGES A 43RD CENTURY BATTLEBOT, SPECIALLY PROGRAMMED FOR HER PURPOSES...
OHH! THAT WAS... CLOSE!
I'M NOT CONCENTRATING HARD ENOUGH. I STILL HAVEN'T LET GO OF MY PROBLEMS AND FOCUSED ON BEATING THIS THING.
IT WOULD SERVE ME RIGHT TO BE VAPORIZED WHILE IN VIRTUAL COMBAT!

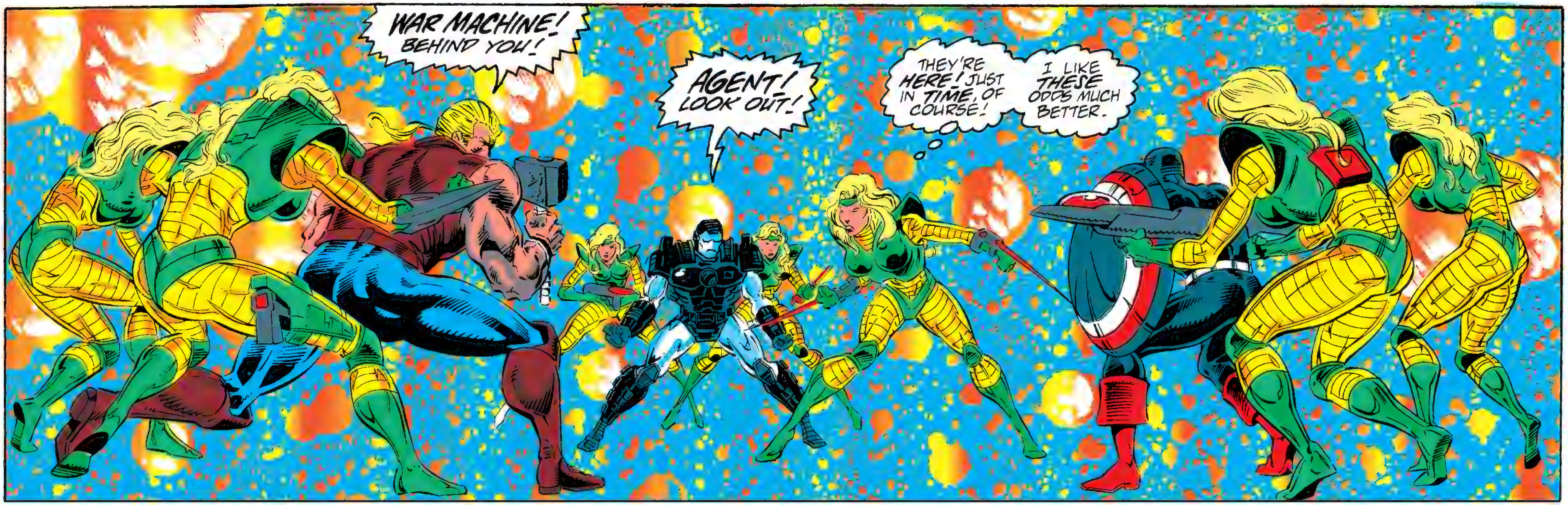

IF ONLY RUNNING THE EMPIRE WERE AS SIMPLE AND STRAIGHT-FORWARD AS OUTFIGHTING A BATTLEBOT!
YOUR VAULTING MANEUVER AVAILS YOU LITTLE AGAINST AN OPPONENT CAPABLE OF 360 DEGREE AXIAL ROTATION.
LITTLE...
VAZZZH
...IS ENOUGH!
BRIDESHEAD, CLEAN UP IN EXERDECK 12.
EXCUSE ME, MISTRESS. AN URGENT MESSAGE.
IF IT'S ANOTHER REMINDER ABOUT THAT COUNCIL MEETING--!
YOU HAVE THREE CROSSTIME VISITORS.
SEND THEM AWAY.
THEY INDICATE IT IS A MATTER OF SOME URGENCY, AFFECTING THE EMPIRE ITSELF.
I'LL JUST BET!
ALL RIGHT, TELL THEM I WILL MEET THEM IN THE PLANETARIUM IN 30 SECONDS.


THE PLANETARIUM... SUCH AN UNSEEMLY SITE TO RECEIVE US. IS IT MY IMAGINATION OR HAS THE PRIME ONE BEEN ACTING OUT OF SORTS LATELY?
BRIDESHEAD, HAS THE PRIME ONE BEEN UNDER SPECIAL STRAIN LATELY?
HIS PRIMACY IS CERTAINLY WELL WITHIN HIS RIGHTS TO EXERCISE PROTOCOL CHANGES AT HIS WHIM, RAULEX.
I AM NOT AT LIBERTY TO DISCUSS, SIR.
IT IS TO BE HOPED THAT THE PRIME ONE RECEIVES OUR TIDINGS IN THE MANNER IN WHICH THEY ARE MEANT.
IF HE DOES NOT, SWAACH, I FEAR FOR THE FUTURE.
I AM HERE. WHAT IS IT YOU NEED TO OCCUPY MY TIME WITH?


YOUR PRIMACY, AS I INTIMATED AT THE LAST COUNCIL SESSIONS, MY SCOUTS HAVE LEARNED THE LOCATION OF THE NEXT CONGRESS OF REALITIES SESSION...
FURTHER, MY SCOUTS REPORT THAT THEIR DELEGATION IS AT THE WEAKEST SINCE THE GREAT DECIMATION OF 1993.
HE SPEAKS AS IF I HAD ATTENDED. IT APPEARS I WILL FIND THE TIME TO GO BACK AND ATTEND IT EVENTUALLY.
WERE WE TO LAUNCH A SURGICAL STRIKE TO DESTROY THE CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS AT THEIR EQUINOCTAL SESSION, WE COULD ANNEX UNTOLD NEW ALTERNATE PROVINCES TO THE EMPIRE!
I ESTIMATE IT WOULD TAKE NO MORE THAN 100 CHRONO-BATTALIONS. I WOULD BE WILLING TO LEAD THE RAID, PRIME ONE-- THAT IS, UNLESS YOU WISH TO CONDUCT IT YOURSELF.
AND IF WE FAIL TO CRUSH THEM COMPLETELY, WE OPEN OURSELVES UP TO TOTAL CROSSTIME WAR!
WE WILL CRUSH THEM COMPLETELY, SIRE, HAVE NO FEAR!
YOU DARE IMPLY THAT I KNOW FEAR?
N-NO PRIME ONE!
DOWNLOAD YOUR PROPOSAL TO BRIDESHEAD IN DETAIL AND I WILL GET BACK TO YOU.
NOW ALL OF YOU-- AWAY!
YES, YOUR PRIMACY.
KANG'S WILL BE DONE!
VUFF

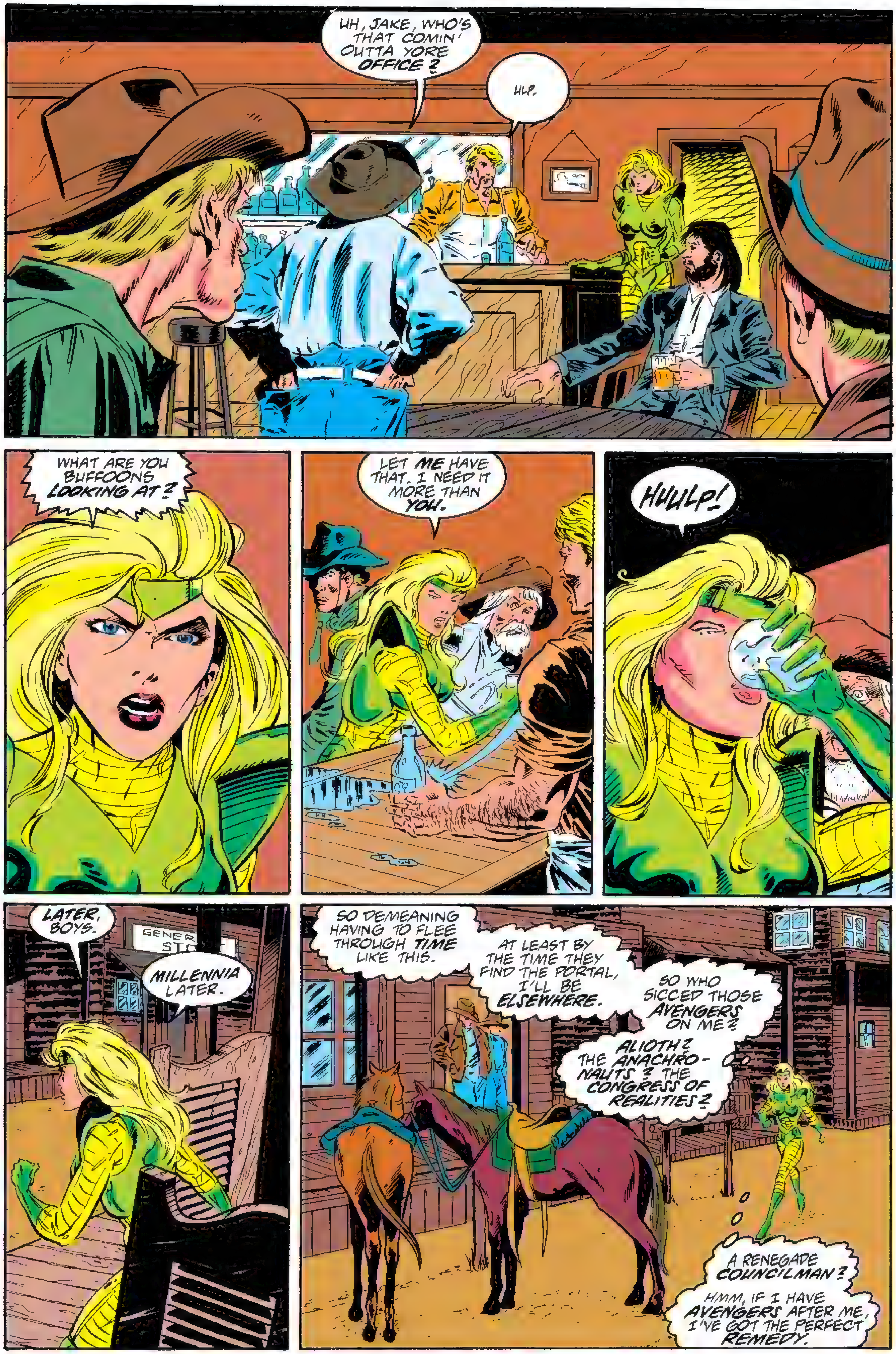

THE CONGRESS OF REALITIES... FAH! SUCH FOLLY TO TRY TO GOVERN ALTERNITY BY DEMOCRACY! STILL, THEY HAVE ALMOST TEN TIMES AS MANY MEMBER-WORLDS AS KANG'S EMPIRE.
THAT IS WHY IT IS INADVISABLE TO DECLARE WAR ON ONE OF THE OTHER TWO GREAT TEMPORAL SUPER-POWERS OF THIS EPOCH WITHOUT BEING PREPARED TO TAKE THE FIGHT TO THE LIMIT.
AND UNTIL I LEARN THE NATURE OF THE BEAST THAT LIES IN THE TIME PERIOD BEFORE MINE, I'M NOT ABOUT TO INSTIGATE--
FWOOM
--WHAT WAS THAT?
HEADS UP--THERE HE IS!
LOOKS LIKE REV'S TRANSPORTER'S RIGHT ON THE MONEY!
NOW LET'S SEE IF HER FIGHTING TIPS PAN OUT!


KNOW SOMETHING, KANG? IF YOU STOPPED MAKING HISTORY LONG ENOUGH TO STUDY IT--
--YOU'D REALIZE THAT NO TYRANT STAYS IN POWER FOREVER!
NO MATTER HOW MANY PEOPLE YOU TRAMPLE UNDER YOUR BOOTS, THERE ARE ALWAYS GUYS LIKE ME READY TO TAKE YOU DOWN!
MY FORCEFIELD-- IT'S BEEN NEUTRALIZED! HOW?
KINK
MY HOLO-CIRCUITRY'S DAMAGED! I'M ASSUMING MY TRUE GUISE!
HEY, KANG'S DOING A SEX CHANGE ON US!
I AM NOT KANG-- OBVIOUSLY!
YOU WILL CEASE THIS CRAVEN ATTACK AND EXPLAIN YOUR PURPOSE IN TRES-PASSING HERE!
WHY ELSE, LADY? WE'RE TOPPLING THE EMPIRE!
THE FORCEFIELD JAMMER REV GAVE WAR MAC DID THE TRICK--
--AND SHE WAS RIGHT ABOUT THIS NOT BEING THE REAL KANG!
I'M VULNERABLE WITH MY FORCEFIELD DOWN-- I'VE GOT TO STALL THEM TILL-- I'VE GOT IT!
SURRENDER, LADY! YOU DON'T HAVE A CHANCE!
A-ALL RIGHT!


WAR MACHINE! BEHIND YOU!
AGENT! LOOK OUT!
THEY'RE HERE! JUST IN TIME, OF COURSE!
I LIKE THESE ODDS MUCH BETTER.

GAAAAHH!
WHOA WHOA WHOA! WHERE'D ALL THESE DUPES COME FROM?
THEY'RE NOT HOLOGRAMS, THAT'S FOR SURE.
I'M BEING HIT WITH A PARTICLE BEAM OF SOME SORT!
THANKS FOR STACKING THE ODDS, TIMEPIECE! MADE ME UNCOMFORTABLE THREE AGAINST ONE!

ULTRA-VIOLET SCAN
INFRARED SCAN
X-RAY SCAN
MICROWAVE SCAN
THUNDER! AGENT! THESE DUPLICATES--I'M GETTING READINGS THAT ARE *IDENTICAL* TO THE ORIGINAL'S! EXCEPT *THEIR FORCE* FIELDS ARE WORKING ON A DIFFERENT *WAVELENGTH!*
THEY'RE *NOT ROBOTS, ANDROIDS OR HOLOGRAMS!*
I THINK THEY'RE ALL THE *REAL* THING SOME-HOW!
DOUBLED BACK IN *TIME*, I'LL BET!
DON'T PULL YOUR SHOTS! HER FUTURISTIC *ARMAMENT* CAN TAKE A LOT!
WAIT A MINUTE! I LOST *TRACK*-- WHICH ONE'S THE *ORIGINAL?*
THIS CRAZY ASTRODOME'S SO *DISORIENTING!*
MY *TIME-SHIFTING GEAR'S* BEEN *DAMAGED!*
I'LL HAVE TO USE ONE OF THE *EXIT-PORTALS!*


UH, JAKE, WHO'S THAT COMIN' OUTTA YORE OFFICE?
HLP.
WHAT ARE YOU BUFFOONS LOOKING AT?
LET ME HAVE THAT. I NEED IT MORE THAN YOU.
HUULP!
LATER, BOYS.
GENER STO
MILLENNIA LATER.
SO DEMEANING HAVING TO FLEE THROUGH TIME LIKE THIS.
AT LEAST BY THE TIME THEY FIND THE PORTAL, I'LL BE ELSEWHERE.
SO WHO SICCED THOSE AVENGERS ON ME?
THE ALIOTH? THE ANACHRONAUTS? THE CONGRESS OF REALITIES?
A RENEGADE COUNCILMAN?
HMM, IF I HAVE AVENGERS AFTER ME, I'VE GOT THE PERFECT REMEDY.

I'LL SIMPLY RECRUIT SOME AVENGERS OF MY OWN!
ELSEWHEN...
HA HA HA! HOW UTTERLY PREDICTABLE OF YOU, DEAR RAVONNA.
I SUPPOSE YOU THINK YOUR AVENGERS ARE TOUGHER THAN MINE? WE'LL SEE ABOUT THAT, WON'T WE?
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THE SIDE OF THE ANGELS!

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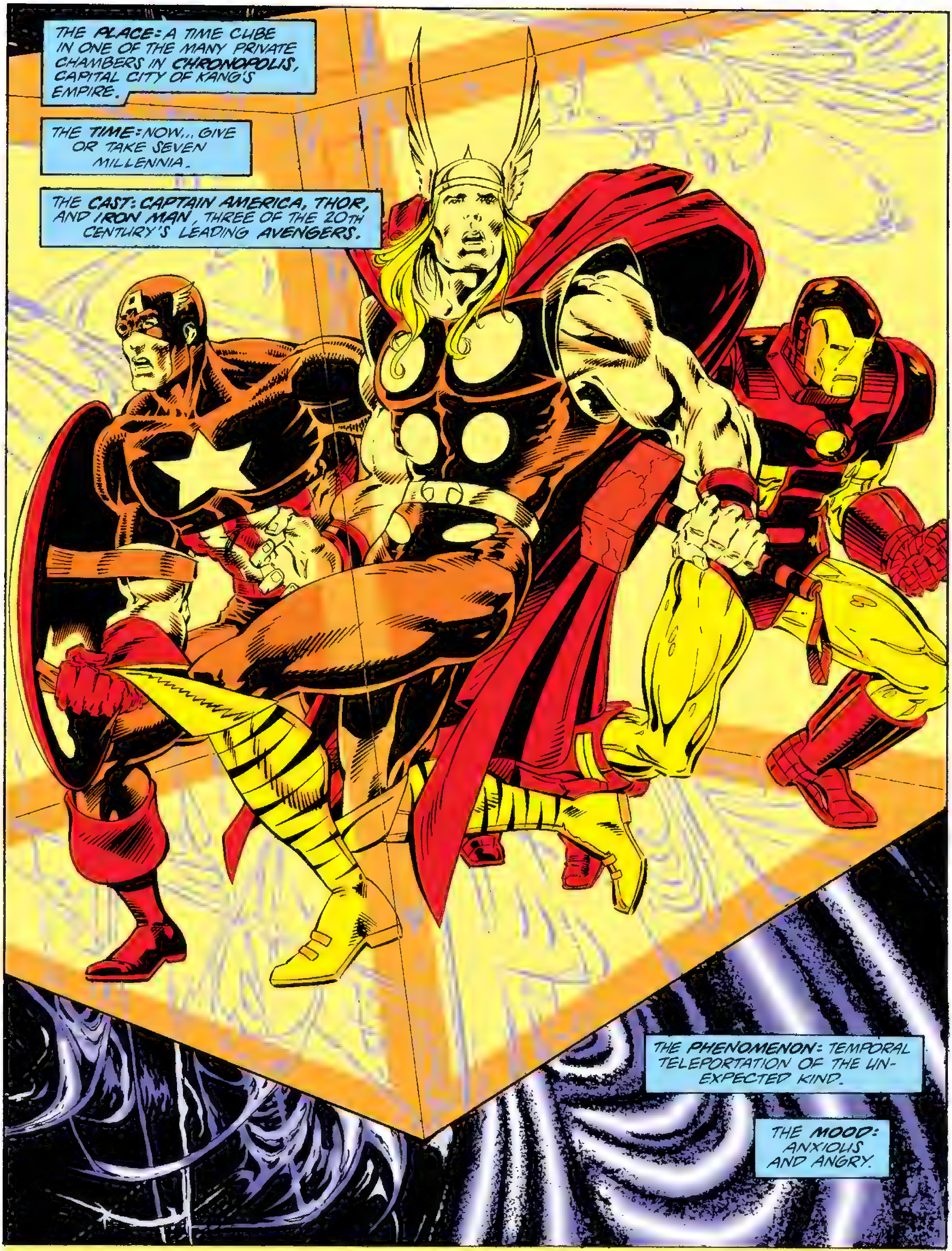
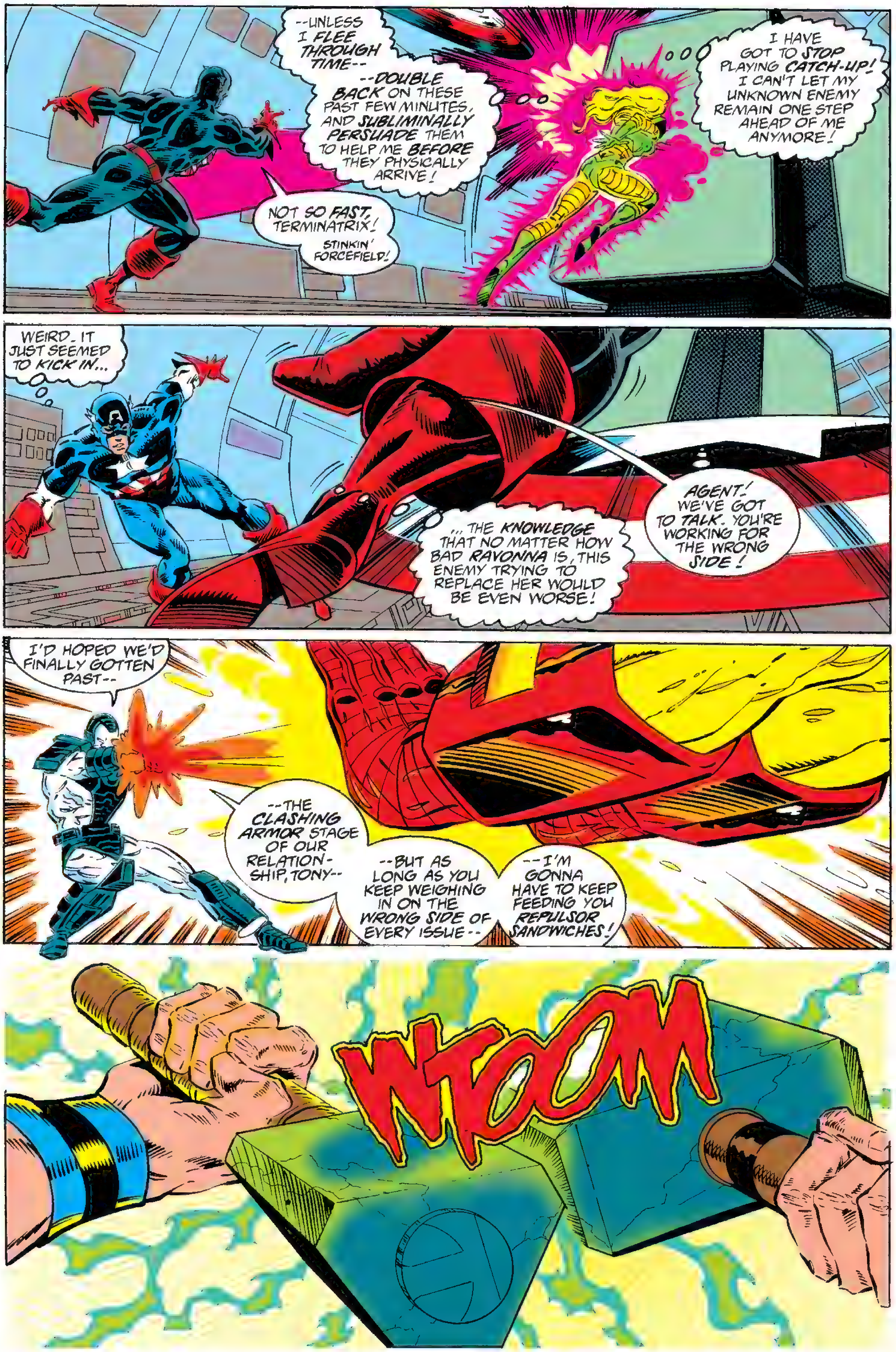

THE **PLACE**: A TIME CUBE IN ONE OF THE MANY PRIVATE CHAMBERS IN **CHRONOPOLIS**, CAPITAL CITY OF KANG'S EMPIRE.
THE **TIME**: NOW... GIVE OR TAKE SEVEN MILLENNIA.
THE **CAST**: **CAPTAIN AMERICA, THOR,** AND **IRON MAN**, THREE OF THE 20TH CENTURY'S LEADING **AVENGERS**.
THE **PHENOMENON**: TEMPORAL TELEPORTATION OF THE UN-EXPECTED KIND.
THE **MOOD**: ANXIOUS AND ANGRY.

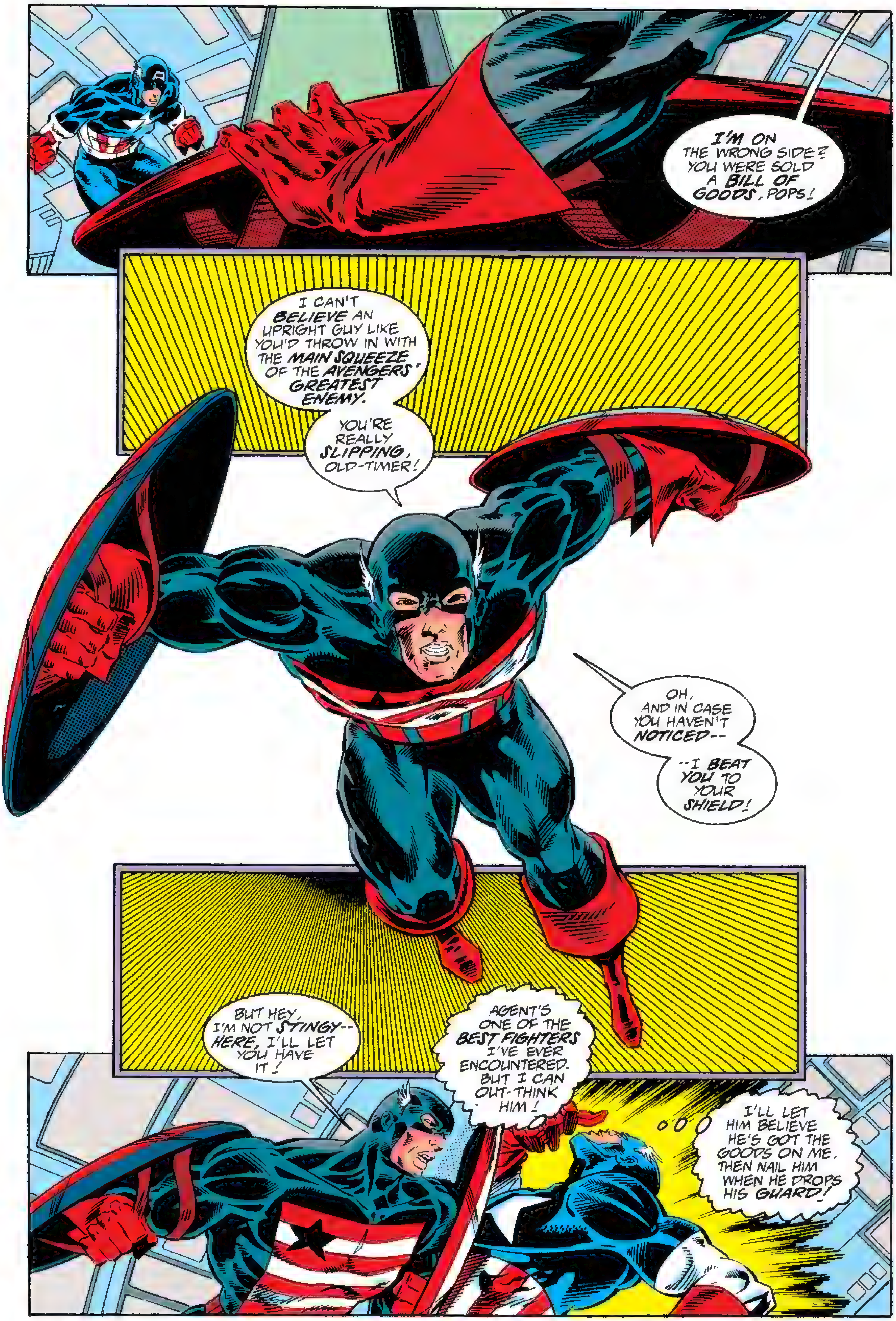
EIGHT GUYS WITH TIME TO KILL:

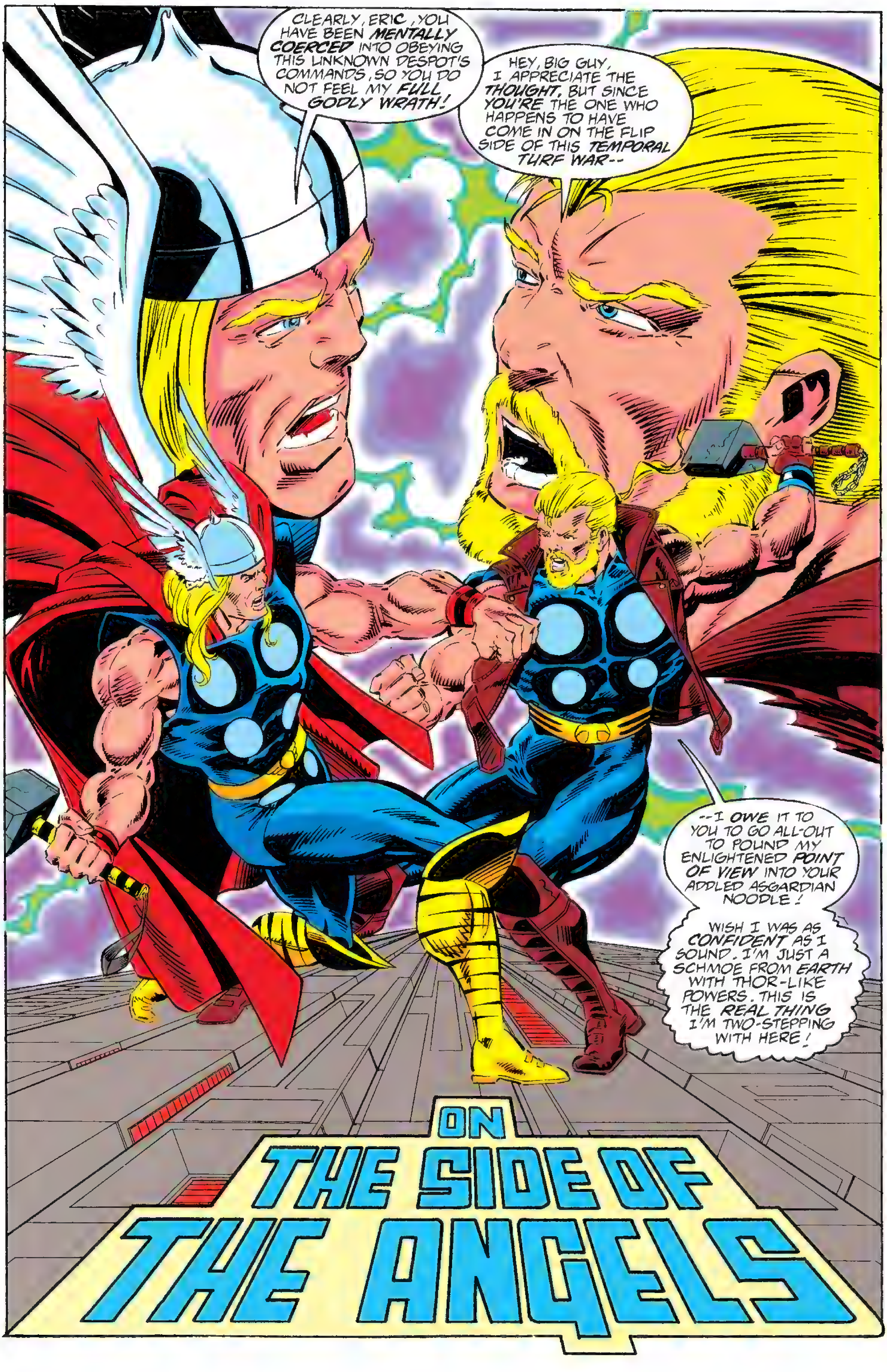
MARK GRUENWALD WRITER
MIKE GUSTOVICH PENCILER
LAROSA & MARTINECK INKER
STEVE DUTRO LETTERER
CHRIS MATTHYS COLORS
RALPH MACCHIO EDITOR
TOM DEFALCO PREDATOR IN CHIEF

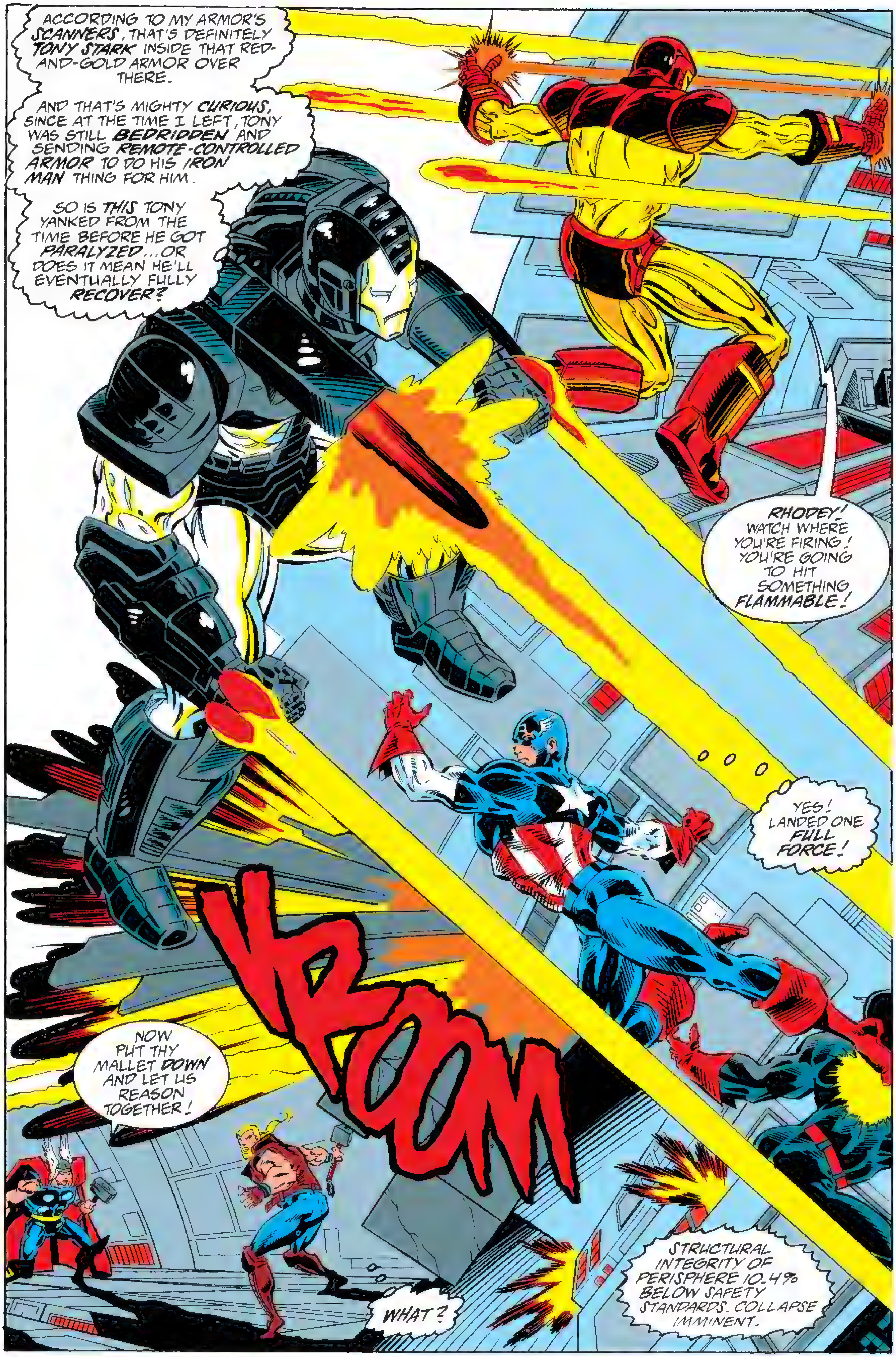
WHO IN--?
WHERE HAST THOU SPIRITED US, WOMAN?
I MEAN YOU NO HARM.
THE OTHERS MAY NOT HAVE MET YOU, BUT I HAVE. YOU ARE RAVONNA, THE KANG WANNA-BE.
THOR, YOU KNEW HER AS NEBULA, THE LADY WHO USED DOCTOR DRUID TO ALMOST WRECK THE AVENGERS.*
DON'T DROP YOUR GUARD--SHE'S CAPABLE OF ANYTHING.
*IN AVENGERS #292-297.--RALFONNA
YOU MAY FIND THIS DIFFICULT TO ACCEPT, BUT I'VE BROUGHT YOU HERE BECAUSE I NEED YOUR HELP!
AN UNKNOWN ENEMY OF MINE HAS RECRUITED U.S. AGENT, WAR MACHINE, AND THUNDERSTRIKE--
--TO AID HER IN CONQUERING MY KANG'S EMPIRE.
I'D LIKE YOU TO HELP ME.
WHAT POSSIBLE REASON WOULD WE HAVE TO AID THEE? IF YOUR ENEMY DEFEATS THEE, THEN THOU SHALT PLAGUE US NO MORE!
BUT MY ENEMY PLANS TO KEEP YOUR FELLOWS HERE SLAVES FOREVER--EH?
THAT ISN'T YOUR DOING, 'VONNA?

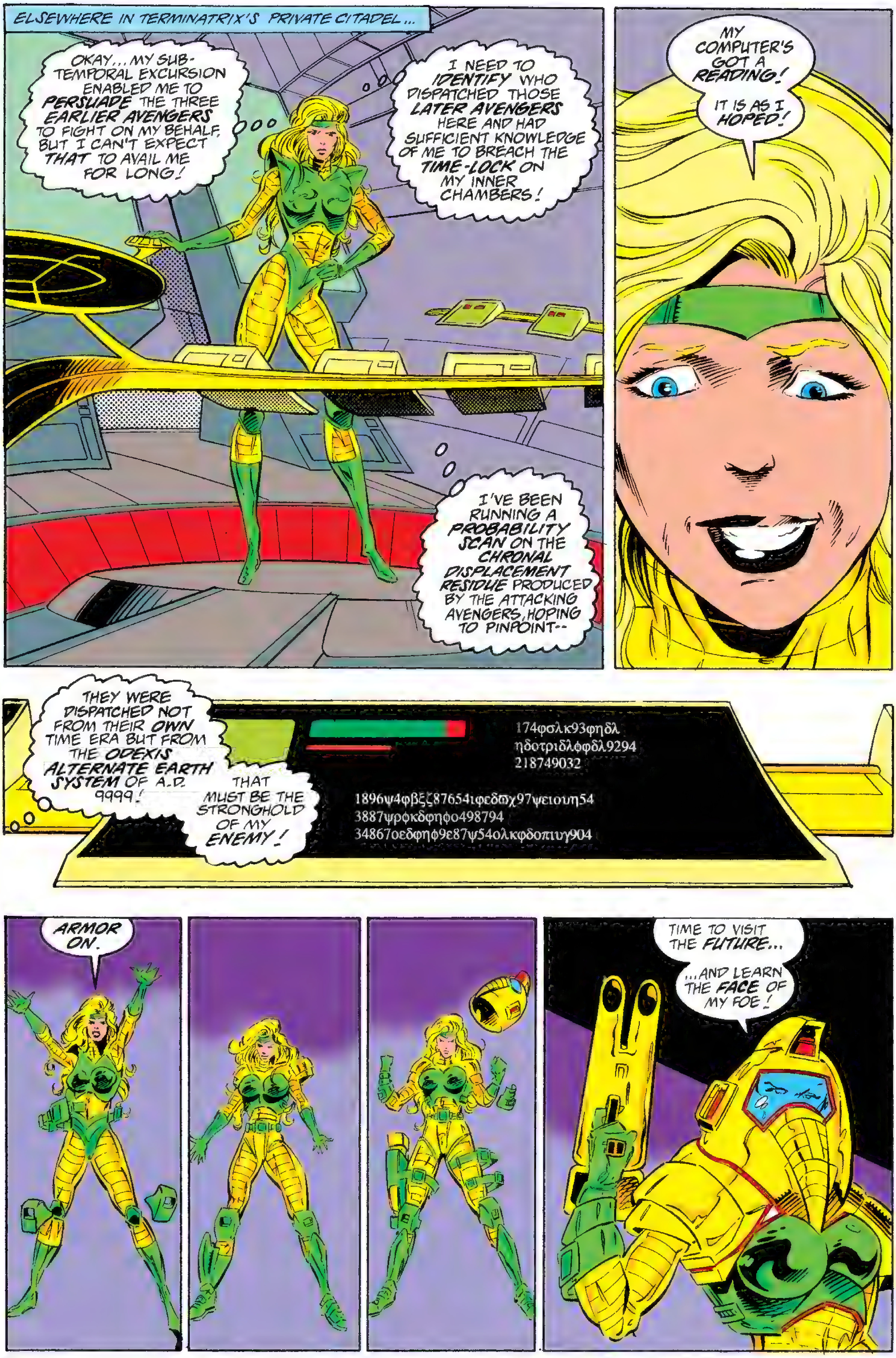
CHECK IT OUT-- TERMINATRIX HAS THREE VERY FAMILIAR LOOKING LACKIES!
CAN THEY BE THE REAL McCOYS, OR LOOKALIKES TO PSYCH US OUT?
NOT ALREADY--!
BILGE! I CAN'T POSSIBLY CONVINCE "MY" AVENGERS TO AID ME NOW--

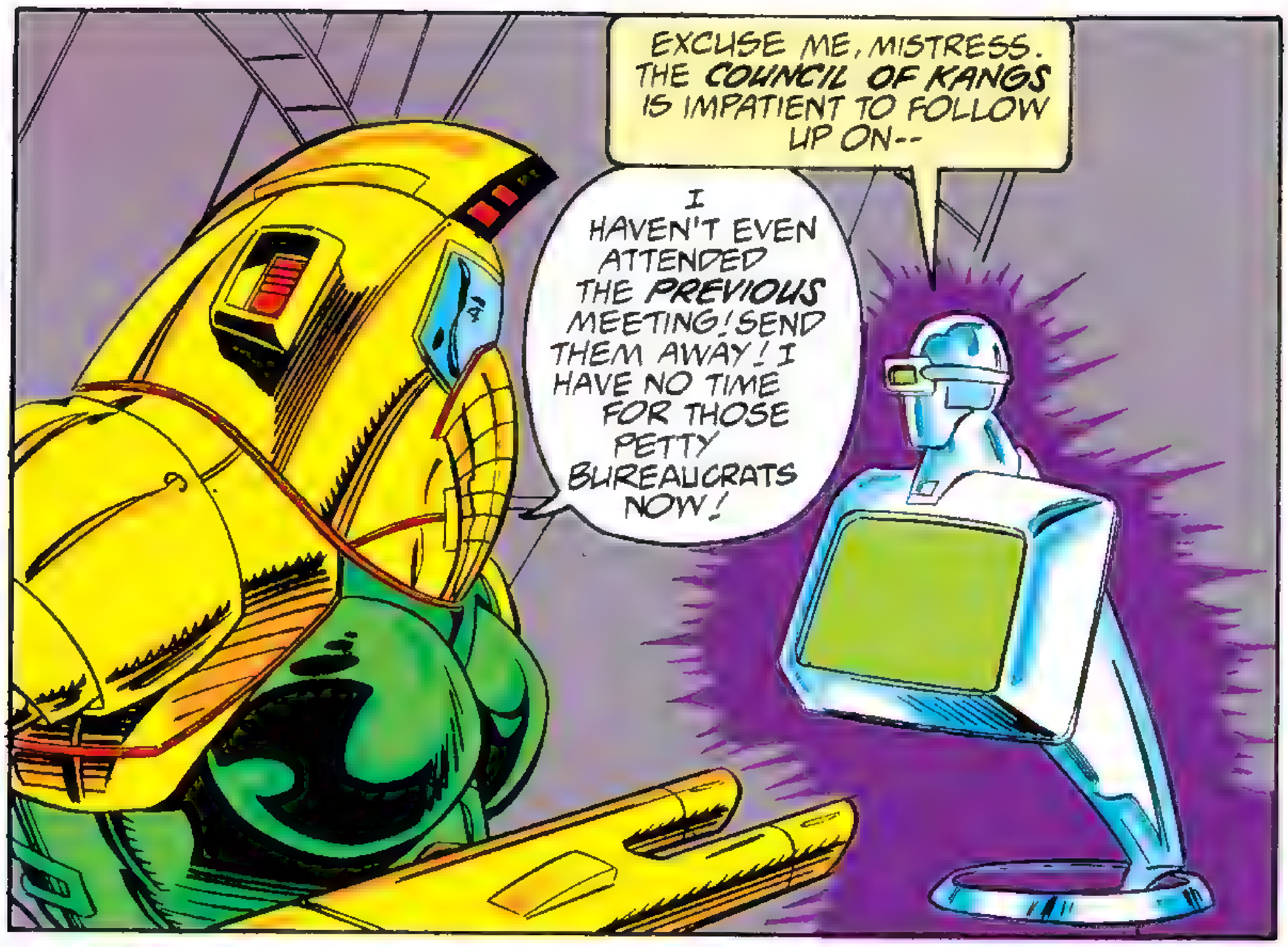

--UNLESS I FLEE THROUGH TIME--
--DOUBLE BACK ON THESE PAST FEW MINUTES, AND SUBLIMINALLY PERSUADE THEM TO HELP ME BEFORE THEY PHYSICALLY ARRIVE!
I HAVE GOT TO STOP PLAYING CATCH-UP! I CAN'T LET MY UNKNOWN ENEMY REMAIN ONE STEP AHEAD OF ME ANYMORE!
NOT SO FAST, TERMINATRIX!
STINKIN' FORCEFIELD!
WEIRD. IT JUST SEEMED TO KICK IN...
...THE KNOWLEDGE THAT NO MATTER HOW BAD RAVONNA IS, THIS ENEMY TRYING TO REPLACE HER WOULD BE EVEN WORSE!
AGENT! WE'VE GOT TO TALK. YOU'RE WORKING FOR THE WRONG SIDE!
I'D HOPED WE'D FINALLY GOTTEN PAST--
--THE CLASHING ARMOR STAGE OF OUR RELATIONSHIP, TONY--
--BUT AS LONG AS YOU KEEP WEIGHING IN ON THE WRONG SIDE OF EVERY ISSUE--
--I'M GONNA HAVE TO KEEP FEEDING YOU REPULSOR SANDWICHES!
WHOOM

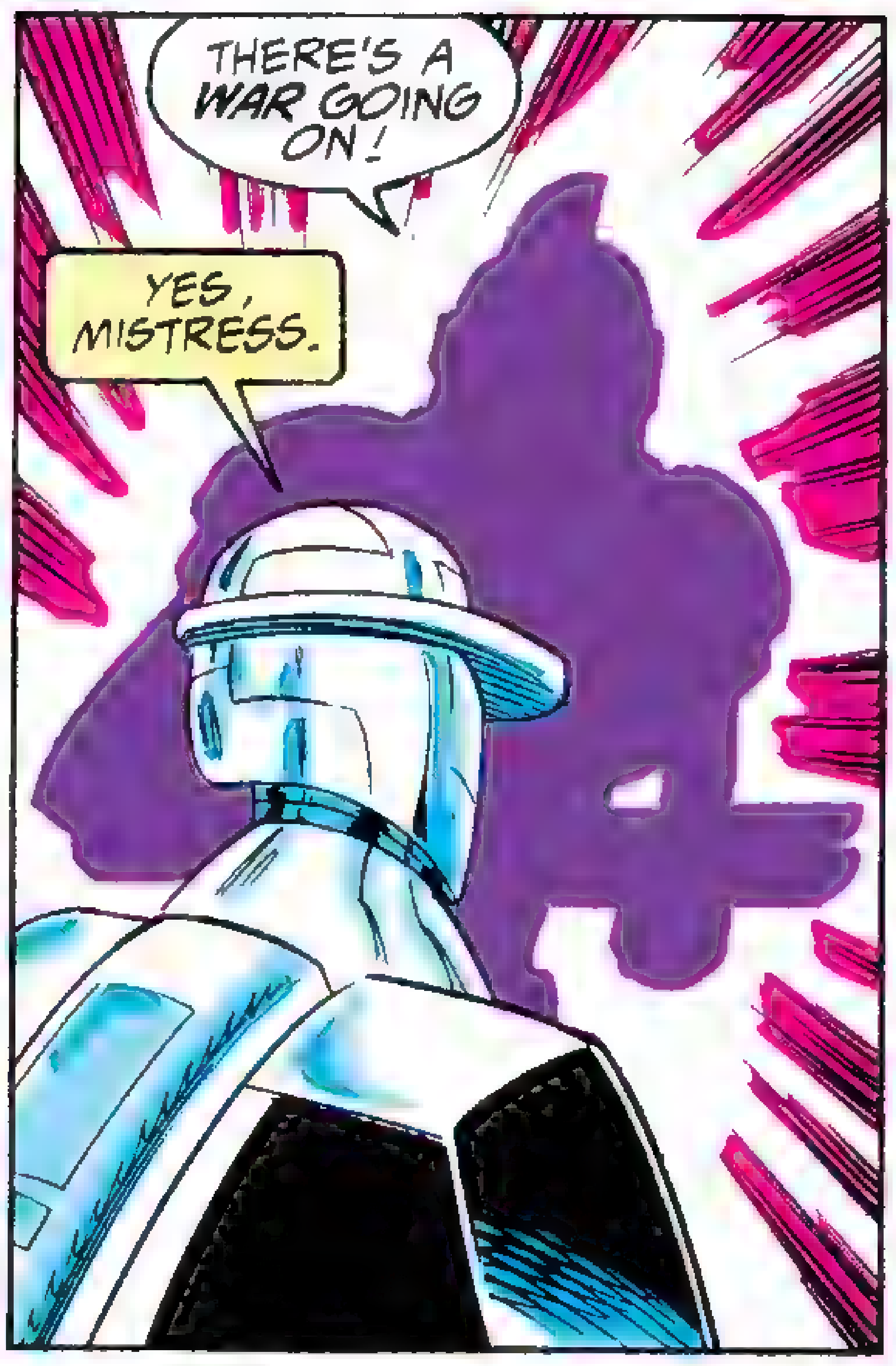

I'M ON THE WRONG SIDE? YOU WERE SOLD A BILL OF GOODS, POPS!
I CAN'T BELIEVE AN UPRIGHT GUY LIKE YOU'D THROW IN WITH THE MAIN SQUEEZE OF THE AVENGERS' GREATEST ENEMY.
YOU'RE REALLY SLIPPING, OLD-TIMER!
OH, AND IN CASE YOU HAVEN'T NOTICED--
--I BEAT YOU TO YOUR SHIELD!
BUT HEY, I'M NOT STINGY-- HERE, I'LL LET YOU HAVE IT!
AGENT'S ONE OF THE BEST FIGHTERS I'VE EVER ENCOUNTERED. BUT I CAN OUT-THINK HIM!
I'LL LET HIM BELIEVE HE'S GOT THE GOODS ON ME, THEN NAIL HIM WHEN HE DROPS HIS GUARD!

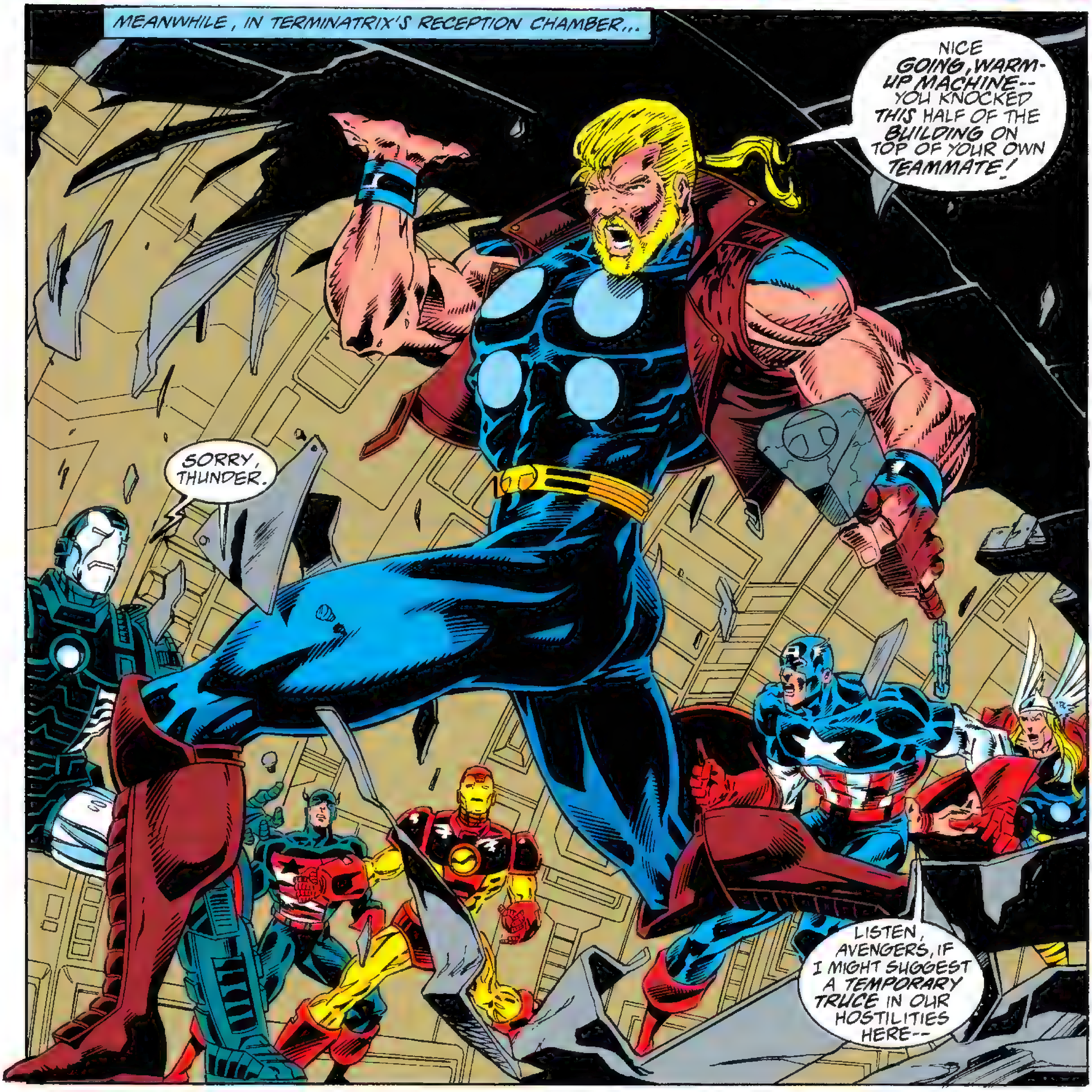

CLEARLY, ERIC, YOU HAVE BEEN *MENTALLY COERCED* INTO OBEYING THIS UNKNOWN DESPOT'S COMMANDS, SO YOU DO NOT FEEL MY *FULL GODLY WRATH!*
HEY, BIG GUY, I APPRECIATE THE *THOUGHT*. BUT SINCE *YOU'RE* THE ONE WHO HAPPENS TO HAVE COME IN ON THE FLIP SIDE OF THIS *TEMPORAL TURF WAR*--
--I *OWE* IT TO YOU TO GO ALL-OUT TO POUND MY ENLIGHTENED *POINT OF VIEW* INTO YOUR ADDLED ASGARDIAN NOODLE!
WISH I WAS AS *CONFIDENT* AS I SOUND. I'M JUST A SCHMOE FROM *EARTH* WITH THOR-LIKE POWERS. THIS IS THE *REAL THING* I'M TWO-STEPPING WITH HERE!
ON THE SIDE OF THE ANGELS

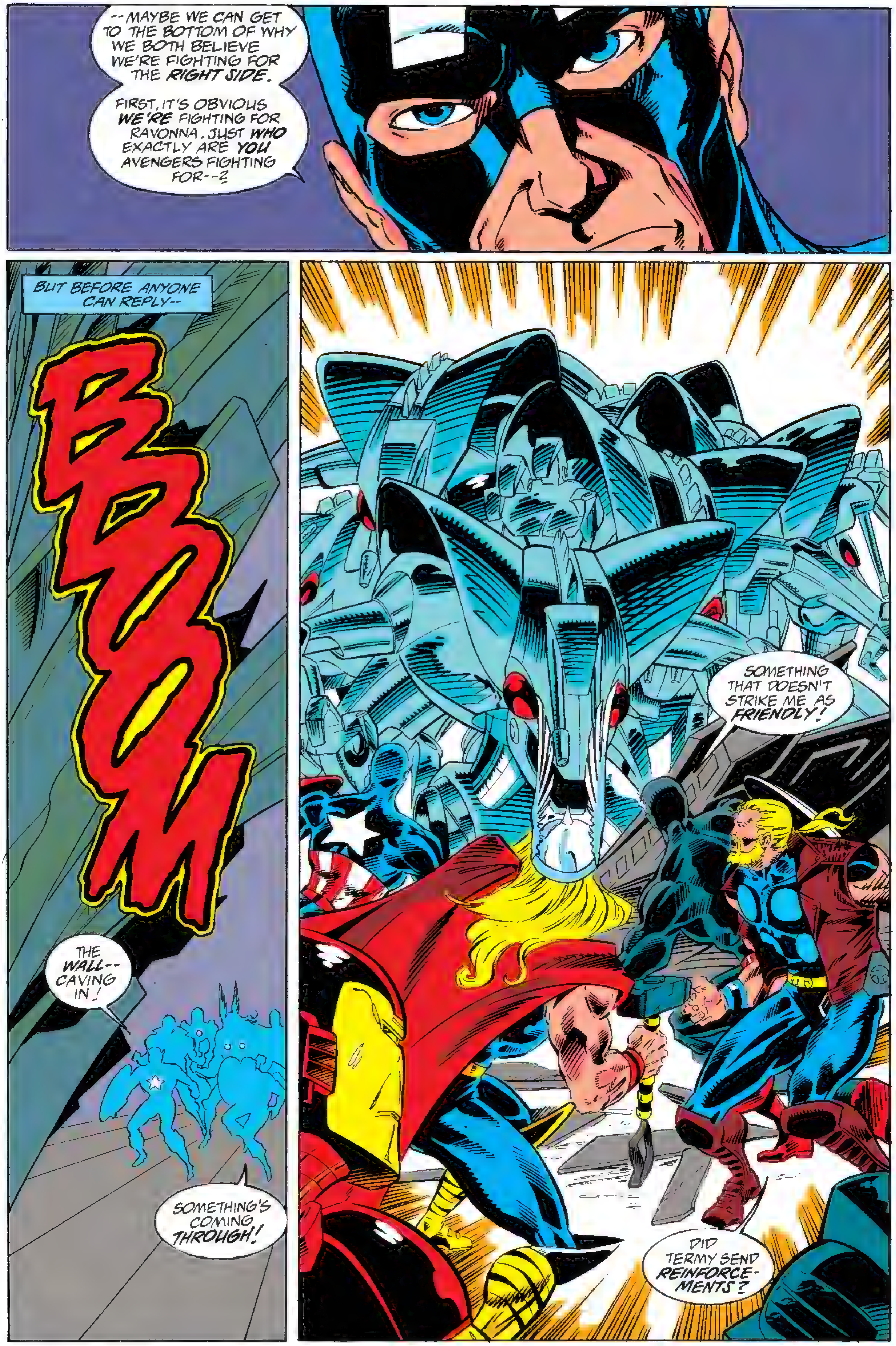

ACCORDING TO MY ARMOR'S **SCANNERS**, THAT'S DEFINITELY **TONY STARK** INSIDE THAT RED-AND-GOLD ARMOR OVER THERE.
AND THAT'S MIGHTY **CURIOUS**, SINCE AT THE TIME I LEFT, TONY WAS STILL **BEDRIDDEN** AND SENDING **REMOTE-CONTROLLED ARMOR** TO DO HIS **IRON MAN** THING FOR HIM.
SO IS **THIS** TONY YANKED FROM THE TIME BEFORE HE GOT **PARALYZED**...OR DOES IT MEAN HE'LL EVENTUALLY FULLY **RECOVER?**
RHODEY! WATCH WHERE YOU'RE FIRING! YOU'RE GOING TO HIT SOMETHING **FLAMMABLE!**
YES! LANDED ONE **FULL FORCE!**
KROOM
NOW PUT THY MALLET **DOWN** AND LET US REASON TOGETHER!
WHAT?
STRUCTURAL INTEGRITY OF PERISPHERE 10.4% BELOW SAFETY STANDARDS. COLLAPSE IMMINENT.

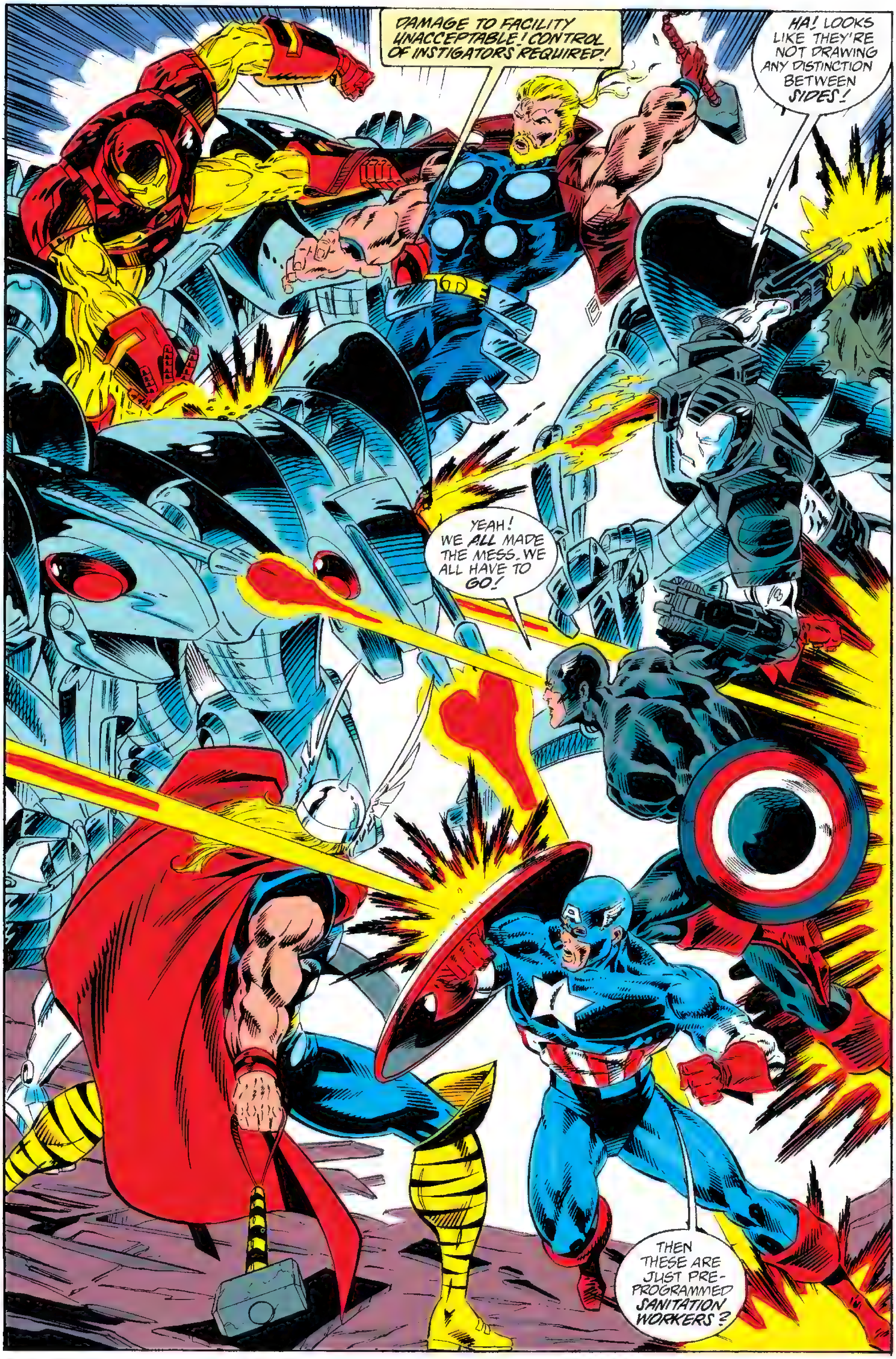

ELSEWHERE IN TERMINATRIX'S PRIVATE CITADEL...
OKAY... MY SUB-TEMPORAL EXCURSION ENABLED ME TO PERSUADE THE THREE EARLIER AVENGERS TO FIGHT ON MY BEHALF, BUT I CAN'T EXPECT THAT TO AVAIL ME FOR LONG!
I NEED TO IDENTIFY WHO DISPATCHED THOSE LATER AVENGERS HERE AND HAD SUFFICIENT KNOWLEDGE OF ME TO BREACH THE TIME-LOCK ON MY INNER CHAMBERS!
I'VE BEEN RUNNING A PROBABILITY SCAN ON THE CHRONAL DISPLACEMENT RESIDUE PRODUCED BY THE ATTACKING AVENGERS, HOPING TO PINPOINT--
MY COMPUTER'S GOT A READING!
IT IS AS I HOPED!
THEY WERE DISPATCHED NOT FROM THEIR OWN TIME ERA BUT FROM THE ODEXIS ALTERNATE EARTH SYSTEM OF A.D. 9999!
174φσλκ93φηδλ
ηδοτριδλφφδλ9294
218749032
1896ψ4φβξζ87654ιφεδϖχ97ψειουη54
3887ψρφκδφηφο498794
34867οεδφηφ9ε87ψ54ολκφδοπιυγ904
THAT MUST BE THE STRONGHOLD OF MY ENEMY!
ARMOR ON.
TIME TO VISIT THE FUTURE...
...AND LEARN THE FACE OF MY FOE!

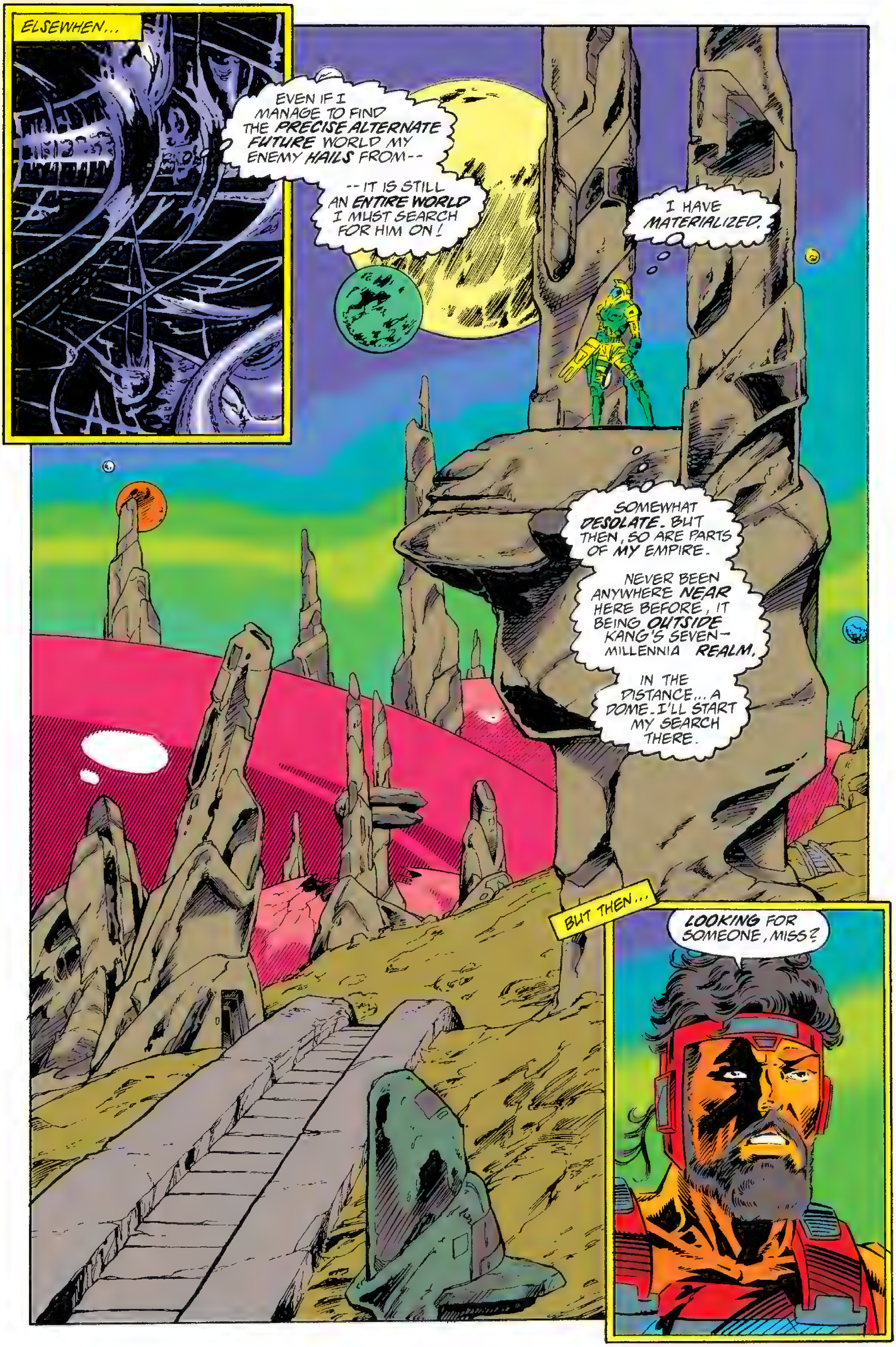

EXCUSE ME, MISTRESS. THE COUNCIL OF KANGS IS IMPATIENT TO FOLLOW UP ON--
I HAVEN'T EVEN ATTENDED THE PREVIOUS MEETING! SEND THEM AWAY! I HAVE NO TIME FOR THOSE PETTY BUREAUCRATS NOW!


THERE'S A WAR GOING ON!
YES, MISTRESS.

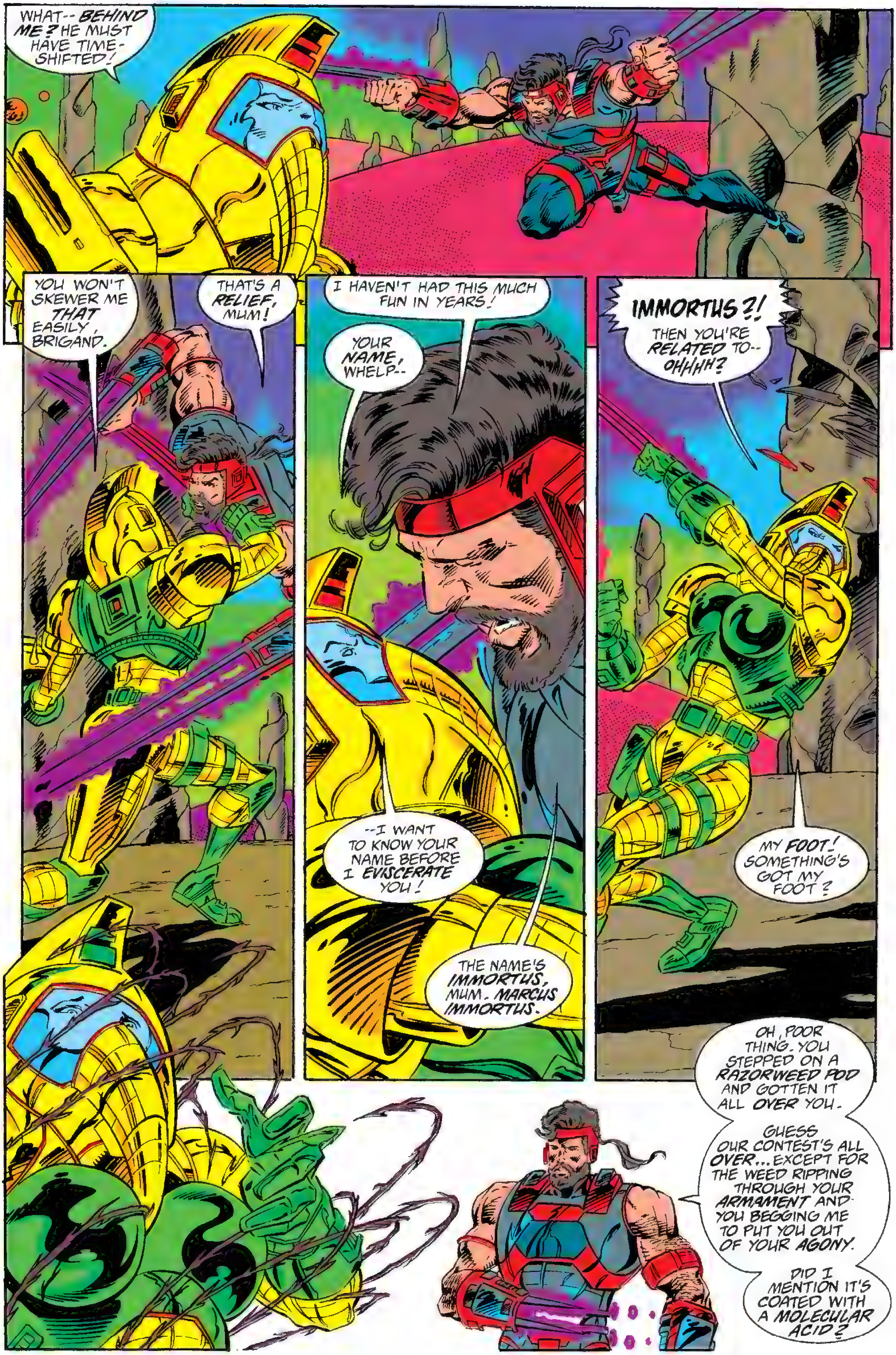

MEANWHILE, IN TERMINATRIX'S RECEPTION CHAMBER...
NICE GOING, WARM-UP MACHINE-- YOU KNOCKED THIS HALF OF THE BUILDING ON TOP OF YOUR OWN TEAMMATE!
SORRY, THUNDER.
LISTEN, AVENGERS, IF I MIGHT SUGGEST A TEMPORARY TRUCE IN OUR HOSTILITIES HERE--

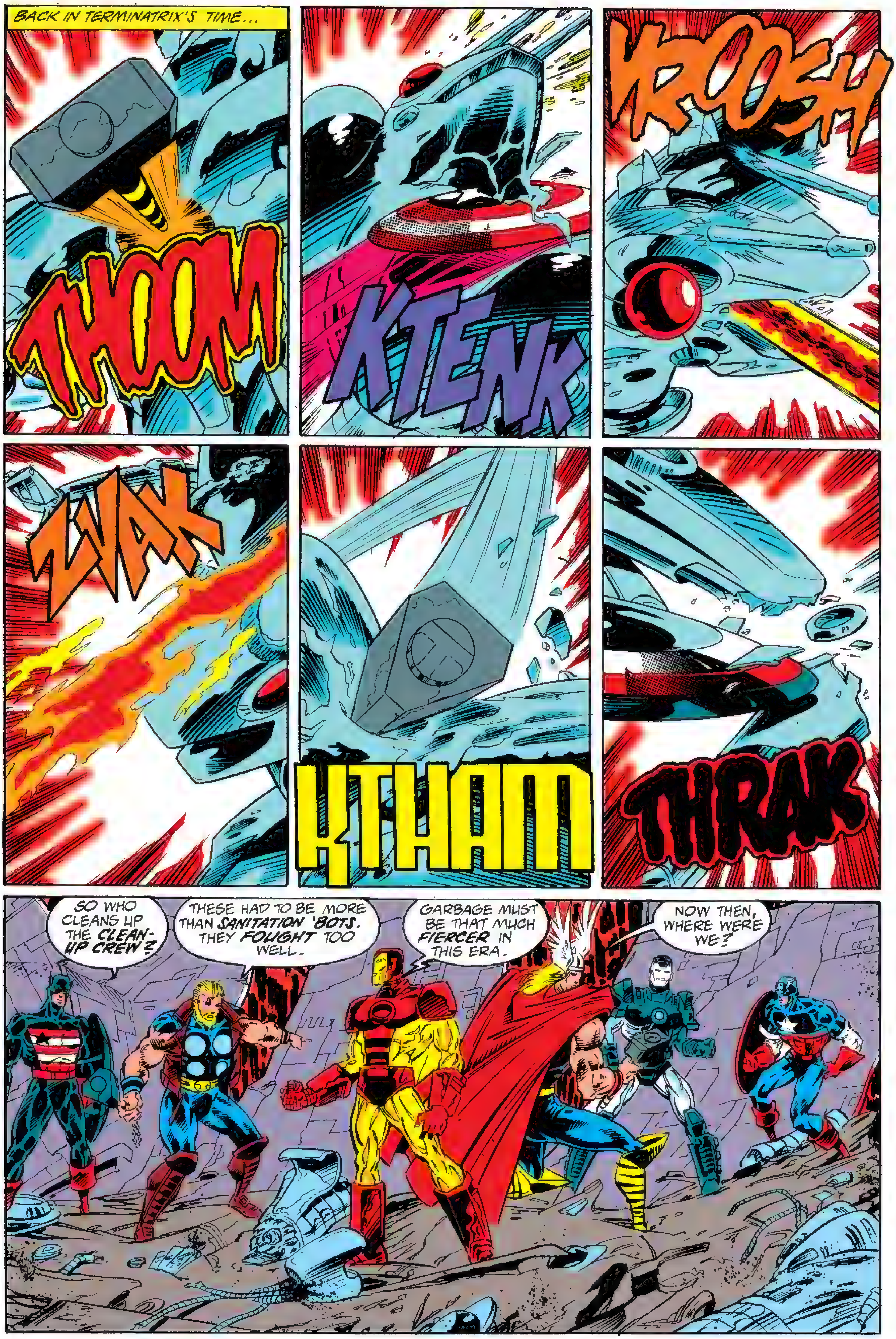

--MAYBE WE CAN GET TO THE BOTTOM OF WHY WE BOTH BELIEVE WE'RE FIGHTING FOR THE RIGHT SIDE.
FIRST, IT'S OBVIOUS WE'RE FIGHTING FOR RAVONNA. JUST WHO EXACTLY ARE YOU AVENGERS FIGHTING FOR--?
BUT BEFORE ANYONE CAN REPLY--
BBOOM
THE WALL-- CAVING IN!
SOMETHING'S COMING THROUGH!
SOMETHING THAT DOESN'T STRIKE ME AS FRIENDLY!
DID TERMY SEND REINFORCE-MENTS?

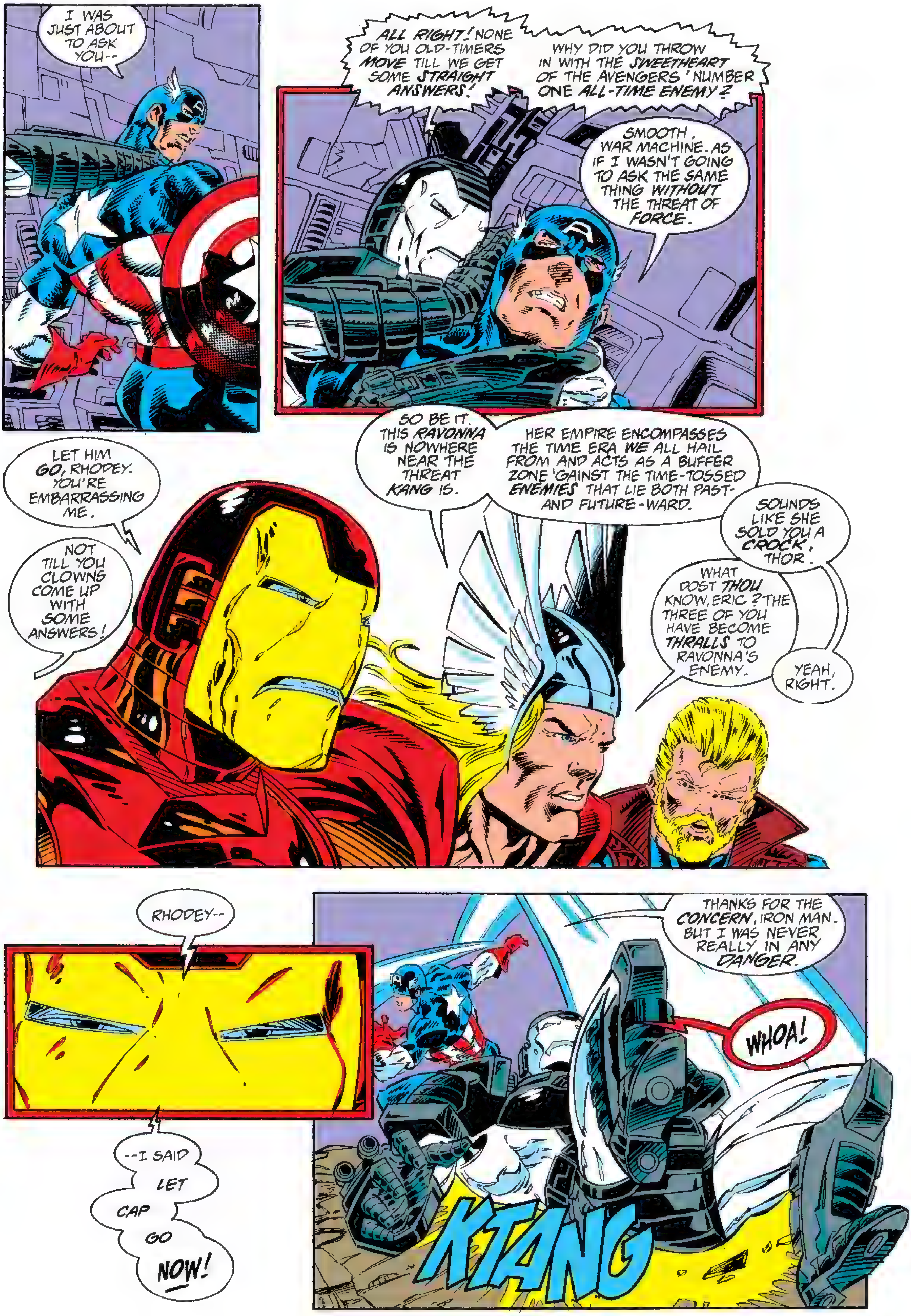

DAMAGE TO FACILITY UNACCEPTABLE! CONTROL OF INSTIGATORS REQUIRED!
HA! LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE NOT DRAWING ANY DISTINCTION BETWEEN *SIDES*!
YEAH! WE *ALL* MADE THE MESS. WE ALL HAVE TO *GO*!
THEN THESE ARE JUST PRE-PROGRAMMED *SANITATION WORKERS*?

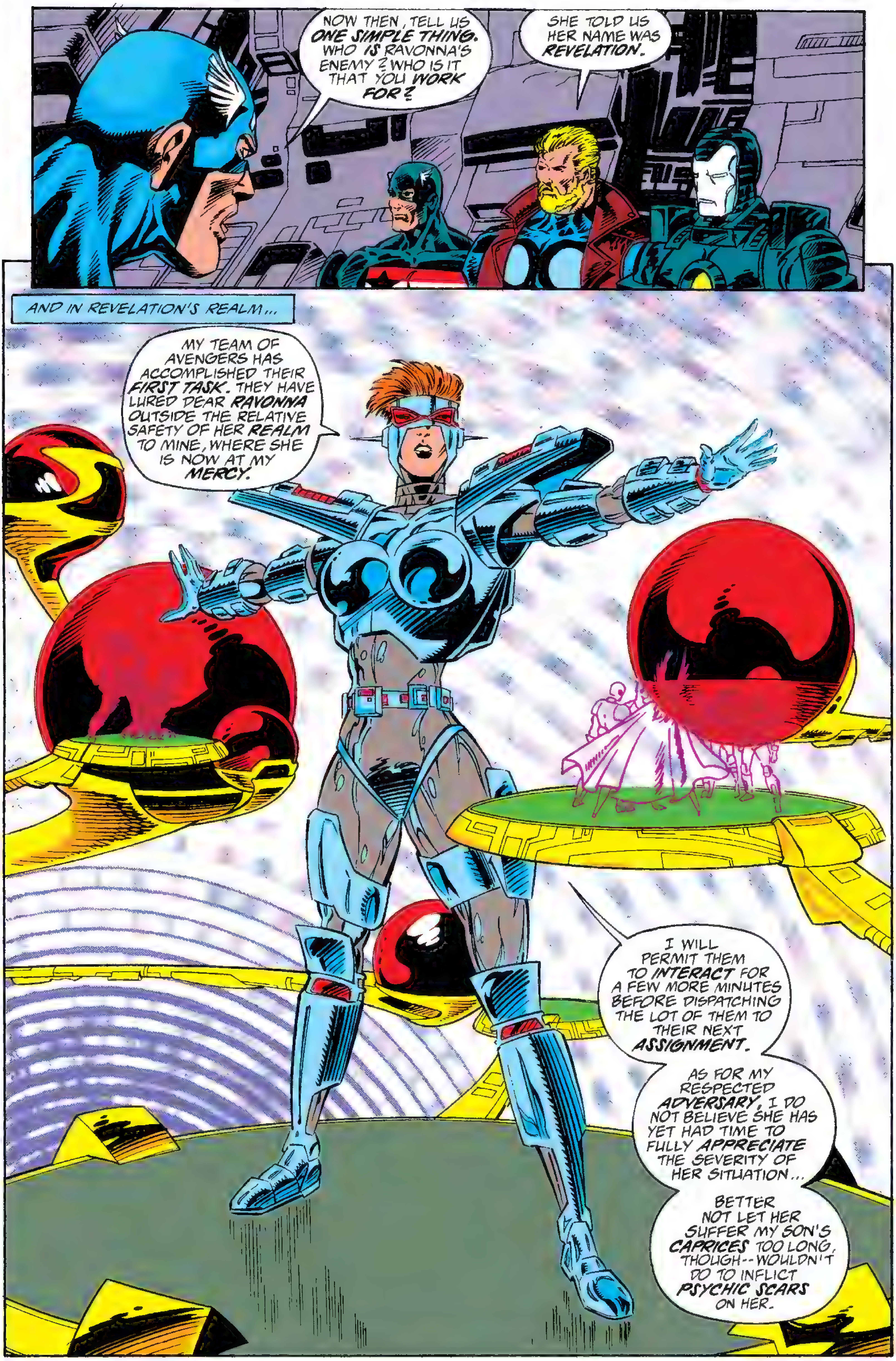

ELSEWHEN...
EVEN IF I MANAGE TO FIND THE PRECISE ALTERNATE FUTURE WORLD MY ENEMY HAILS FROM--
--IT IS STILL AN ENTIRE WORLD I MUST SEARCH FOR HIM ON!
I HAVE MATERIALIZED.
SOMEWHAT DESOLATE. BUT THEN, SO ARE PARTS OF MY EMPIRE.
NEVER BEEN ANYWHERE NEAR HERE BEFORE, IT BEING OUTSIDE KANG'S SEVEN-MILLENNIA REALM.
IN THE DISTANCE... A DOME. I'LL START MY SEARCH THERE.
BUT THEN...
LOOKING FOR SOMEONE, MISS?

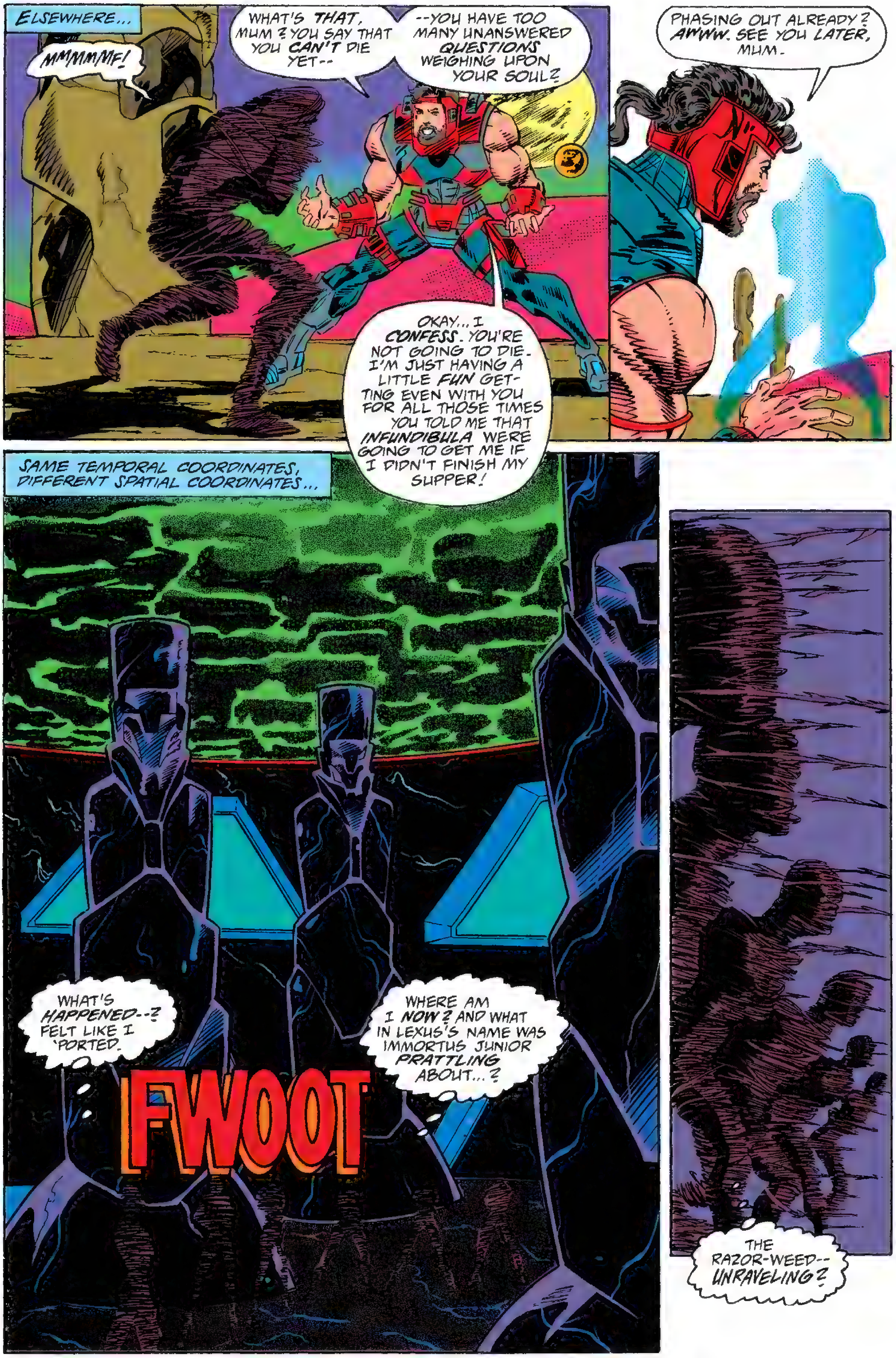
YOU... SPEAK MY **DIALECT** HERE? WHO **ARE** YOU? DID **YOU** SEND AVENGERS AFTER ME?
AVENGERS, HMM? YOU WOULDN'T HAPPEN TO BE REFERRING TO THAT **TEAM OF SUPERHUMAN BEINGS** OF THE LATE 20TH AND EARLY 21ST CENTURIES, WOULD YOU?
NO, MA'AM. **I** SENT NO AVENGERS AFTER YOU, BUT I **KNOW** WHO DID.
OF COURSE, YOU'LL HAVE TO **KILL** ME BEFORE I WOULD BETRAY **THAT** DATA!
AS YOU **WISH!**
GONE! BUT I DIDN'T HAVE MY CANNON SET ON **DISINTEGRATE.** WHERE...?

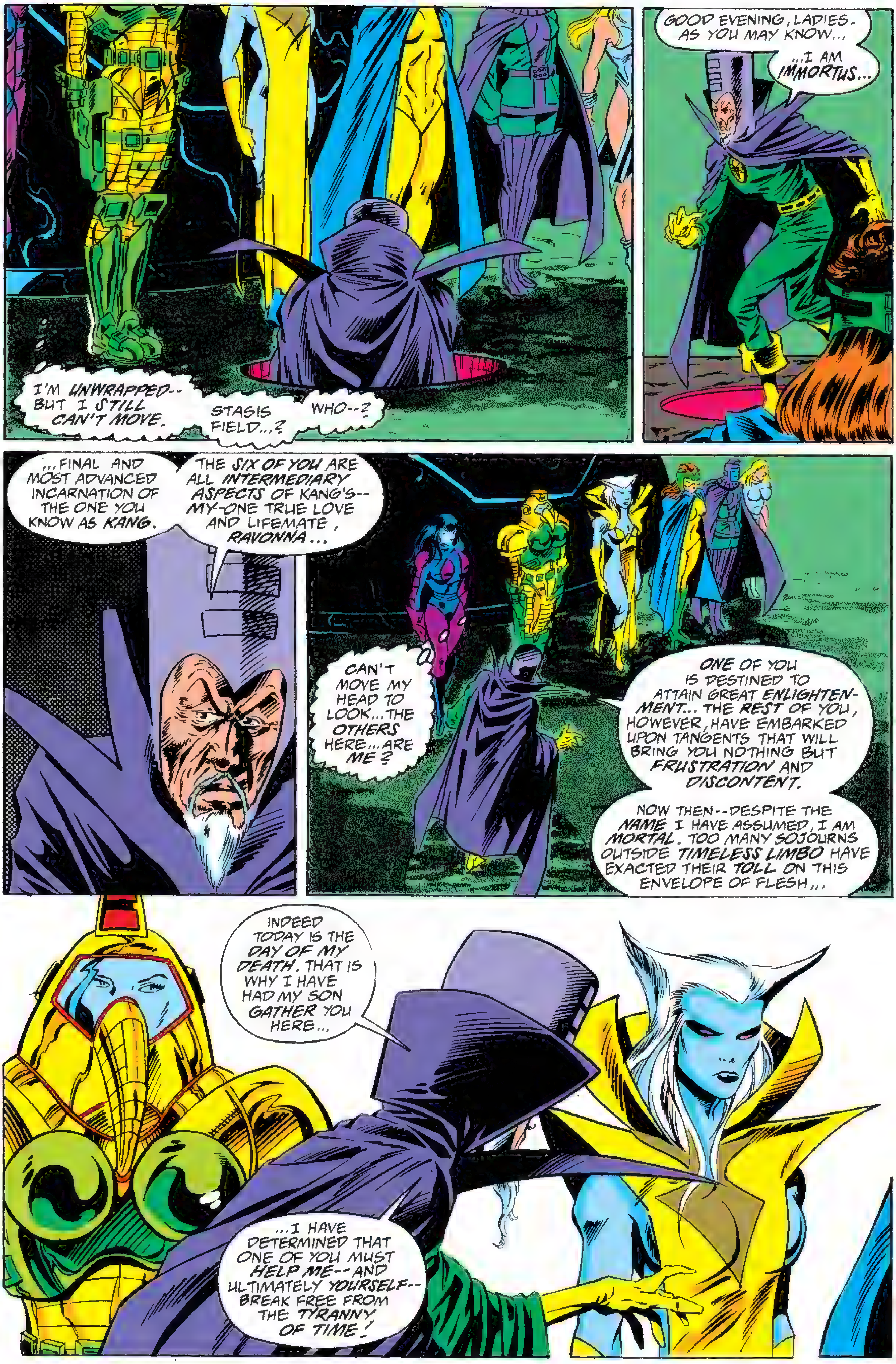

WHAT-- BEHIND ME ? HE MUST HAVE TIME-SHIFTED !
YOU WON'T SKEWER ME THAT EASILY, BRIGAND.
THAT'S A RELIEF, MUM!
I HAVEN'T HAD THIS MUCH FUN IN YEARS!
YOUR NAME, WHELP--
--I WANT TO KNOW YOUR NAME BEFORE I EVISCERATE YOU!
THE NAME'S IMMORTUS, MUM. MARCUS IMMORTUS.
IMMORTUS ?!
THEN YOU'RE RELATED TO-- OHHHH?
MY FOOT! SOMETHING'S GOT MY FOOT ?
OH, POOR THING. YOU STEPPED ON A RAZORWEED POD AND GOTTEN IT ALL OVER YOU.
GUESS OUR CONTEST'S ALL OVER... EXCEPT FOR THE WEED RIPPING THROUGH YOUR ARMAMENT AND YOU BEGGING ME TO PUT YOU OUT OF YOUR AGONY.
DID I MENTION IT'S COATED WITH A MOLECULAR ACID ?


BACK IN TERMINATRIX'S TIME...
THOOM
KTENK
VRoosh
ZZAK
KTHAM
THRAK
SO WHO CLEANS UP THE CLEAN-UP CREW?
THESE HAD TO BE MORE THAN SANITATION 'BOTS. THEY FOUGHT TOO WELL.
GARBAGE MUST BE THAT MUCH FIERCER IN THIS ERA.
NOW THEN, WHERE WERE WE?

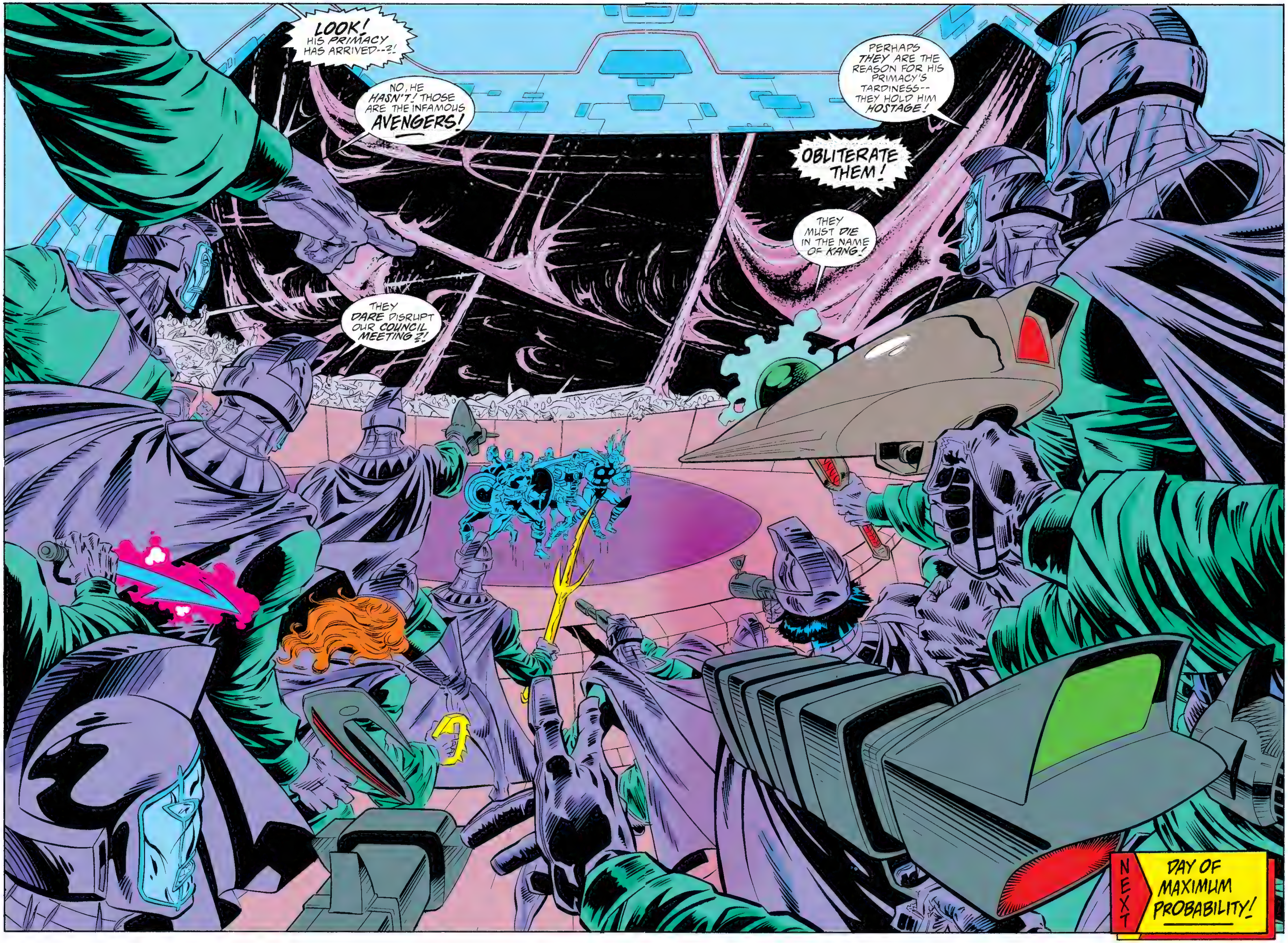

I WAS JUST ABOUT TO ASK YOU--
ALL RIGHT! NONE OF YOU OLD-TIMERS MOVE TILL WE GET SOME STRAIGHT ANSWERS!
WHY DID YOU THROW IN WITH THE SWEETHEART OF THE AVENGERS' NUMBER ONE ALL-TIME ENEMY?
SMOOTH, WAR MACHINE. AS IF I WASN'T GOING TO ASK THE SAME THING WITHOUT THE THREAT OF FORCE.
LET HIM GO, RHODEY. YOU'RE EMBARRASSING ME.
NOT TILL YOU CLOWNS COME UP WITH SOME ANSWERS!
SO BE IT. THIS RAVONNA IS NOWHERE NEAR THE THREAT KANG IS.
HER EMPIRE ENCOMPASSES THE TIME ERA WE ALL HAIL FROM AND ACTS AS A BUFFER ZONE 'GAINST THE TIME-TOSSED ENEMIES THAT LIE BOTH PAST- AND FUTURE-WARD.
SOUNDS LIKE SHE SOLD YOU A CROCK, THOR.
WHAT DOST THOU KNOW, ERIC? THE THREE OF YOU HAVE BECOME THRALLS TO RAVONNA'S ENEMY.
YEAH, RIGHT.
RHODEY--
--I SAID LET CAP GO NOW!
THANKS FOR THE CONCERN, IRON MAN. BUT I WAS NEVER REALLY IN ANY DANGER.
WHOA!
KTANG


NOW THEN, TELL US ONE SIMPLE THING. WHO IS RAVONNA'S ENEMY? WHO IS IT THAT YOU WORK FOR?
SHE TOLD US HER NAME WAS REVELATION.
AND IN REVELATION'S REALM...
MY TEAM OF AVENGERS HAS ACCOMPLISHED THEIR FIRST TASK. THEY HAVE LURED DEAR RAVONNA OUTSIDE THE RELATIVE SAFETY OF HER REALM TO MINE, WHERE SHE IS NOW AT MY MERCY.
I WILL PERMIT THEM TO INTERACT FOR A FEW MORE MINUTES BEFORE DISPATCHING THE LOT OF THEM TO THEIR NEXT ASSIGNMENT.
AS FOR MY RESPECTED ADVERSARY, I DO NOT BELIEVE SHE HAS YET HAD TIME TO FULLY APPRECIATE THE SEVERITY OF HER SITUATION...
BETTER NOT LET HER SUFFER MY SON'S CAPRICES TOO LONG, THOUGH--WOULDN'T DO TO INFLICT PSYCHIC SCARS ON HER.


ELSEWHERE...
MMMMMF!
WHAT'S THAT, MUM? YOU SAY THAT YOU CAN'T DIE YET--
--YOU HAVE TOO MANY UNANSWERED QUESTIONS WEIGHING UPON YOUR SOUL?
OKAY... I CONFESS. YOU'RE NOT GOING TO DIE. I'M JUST HAVING A LITTLE FUN GETTING EVEN WITH YOU FOR ALL THOSE TIMES YOU TOLD ME THAT INFUNDIBULA WERE GOING TO GET ME IF I DIDN'T FINISH MY SUPPER!
PHASING OUT ALREADY? AWWW. SEE YOU LATER, MUM.
SAME TEMPORAL COORDINATES, DIFFERENT SPATIAL COORDINATES...
WHAT'S HAPPENED--? FELT LIKE I 'PORTED.
FWOOT
WHERE AM I NOW? AND WHAT IN LEXUS'S NAME WAS IMMORTUS JUNIOR PRATTLING ABOUT...?
THE RAZOR-WEED--UNRAVELING?


I'M UNWRAPPED-- BUT I STILL CAN'T MOVE.
STASIS FIELD...?
WHO--?
GOOD EVENING, LADIES. AS YOU MAY KNOW...
...I AM IMMORTUS...
...FINAL AND MOST ADVANCED INCARNATION OF THE ONE YOU KNOW AS KANG.
THE SIX OF YOU ARE ALL INTERMEDIARY ASPECTS OF KANG'S--MY--ONE TRUE LOVE AND LIFEMATE, RAVONNA...
CAN'T MOVE MY HEAD TO LOOK...THE OTHERS HERE...ARE ME?
ONE OF YOU IS DESTINED TO ATTAIN GREAT ENLIGHTENMENT... THE REST OF YOU, HOWEVER, HAVE EMBARKED UPON TANGENTS THAT WILL BRING YOU NOTHING BUT FRUSTRATION AND DISCONTENT.
NOW THEN--DESPITE THE NAME I HAVE ASSUMED, I AM MORTAL. TOO MANY SOJOURNS OUTSIDE TIMELESS LIMBO HAVE EXACTED THEIR TOLL ON THIS ENVELOPE OF FLESH...
INDEED TODAY IS THE DAY OF MY DEATH. THAT IS WHY I HAVE HAD MY SON GATHER YOU HERE...
...I HAVE DETERMINED THAT ONE OF YOU MUST HELP ME--AND ULTIMATELY YOURSELF--BREAK FREE FROM THE TYRANNY OF TIME!

DOWNTIME FIFTY CENTURIES...
ALL RIGHT, BUT THE DUPES GOT TO BUY THE NON-DUPES ALL THE PIZZA THEY CAN EAT!
ALL RIGHT, THEN, IT'S AGREED. WE CEASE FURTHER HOSTILITIES TILL WE CAN DETERMINE WHICH TEAM'S BEEN DUPED AND WHICH IS ON THE SIDE OF THE ANGELS...
...IF EITHER.
YOU'RE ASSUMING WE'RE GONNA GET WITHIN A HUNDRED YEARS OF PIZZA, THUNDER!
BUT THEN...
FWOOOSH


LOOK! HIS PRIMACY HAS ARRIVED--?!
NO, HE HASN'T! THOSE ARE THE INFAMOUS AVENGERS!
THEY DARE DISRUPT OUR COUNCIL MEETING?!
PERHAPS THEY ARE THE REASON FOR HIS PRIMACY'S TARDINESS-- THEY HOLD HIM HOSTAGE!
OBLITERATE THEM!
THEY MUST DIE IN THE NAME OF KANG!
NEXT
DAY OF MAXIMUM PROBABILITY!

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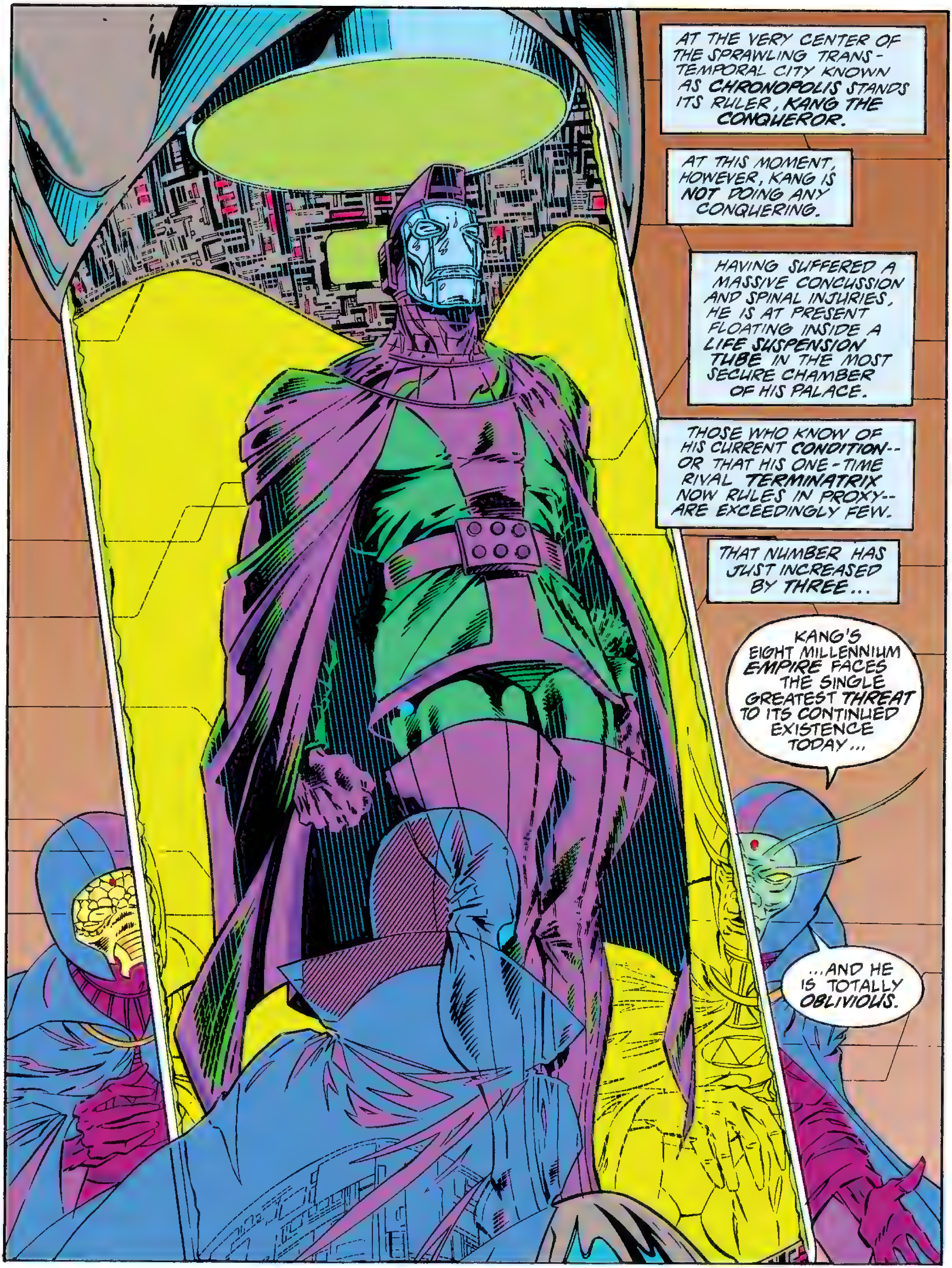
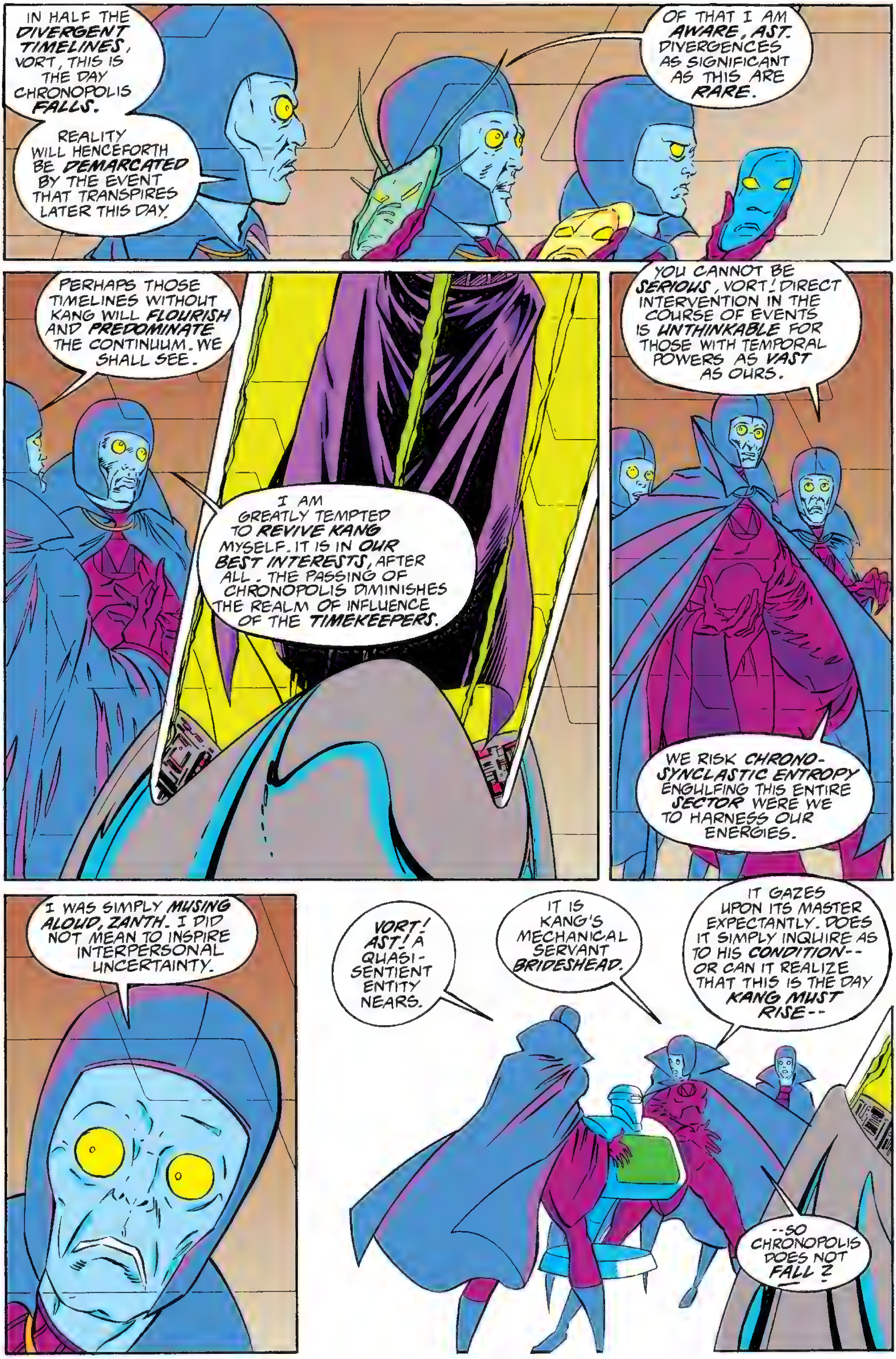
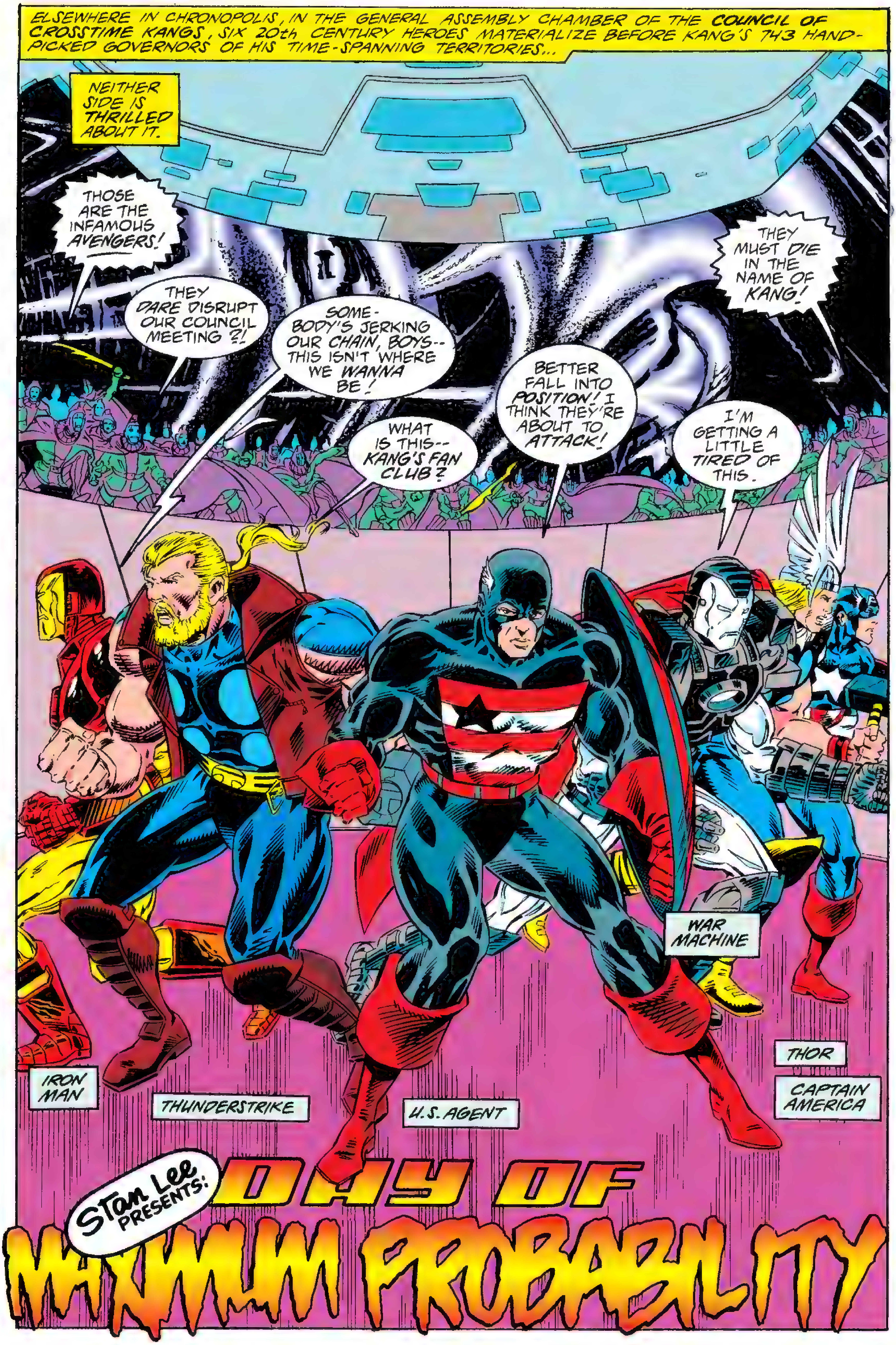
AVENGERS
BY THYSELF DESTROYED!
GUSTOVICH '93

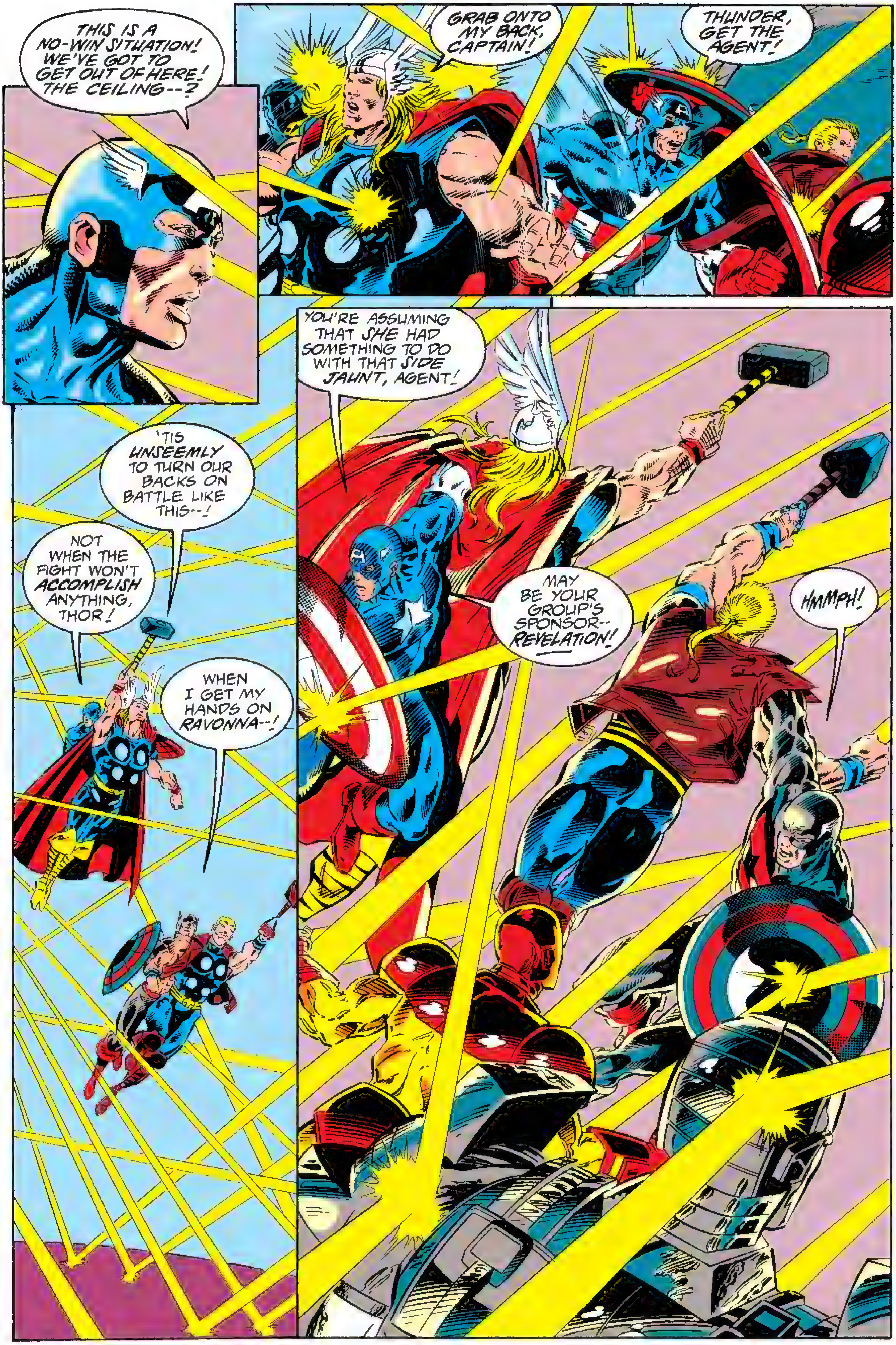

AT THE VERY CENTER OF THE SPRAWLING TRANS-TEMPORAL CITY KNOWN AS **CHRONOPOLIS** STANDS ITS RULER, **KANG THE CONQUEROR.**
AT THIS MOMENT, HOWEVER, KANG IS **NOT** DOING ANY CONQUERING.
HAVING SUFFERED A MASSIVE CONCUSSION AND SPINAL INJURIES, HE IS AT PRESENT FLOATING INSIDE A **LIFE SUSPENSION TUBE** IN THE MOST SECURE CHAMBER OF HIS PALACE.
THOSE WHO KNOW OF HIS CURRENT **CONDITION**-- OR THAT HIS ONE-TIME RIVAL **TERMINATRIX** NOW RULES IN PROXY-- ARE EXCEEDINGLY FEW.
THAT NUMBER HAS JUST INCREASED BY **THREE**...
KANG'S EIGHT MILLENNIUM **EMPIRE** FACES THE SINGLE GREATEST **THREAT** TO ITS CONTINUED EXISTENCE TODAY...
...AND HE IS TOTALLY **OBLIVIOUS.**

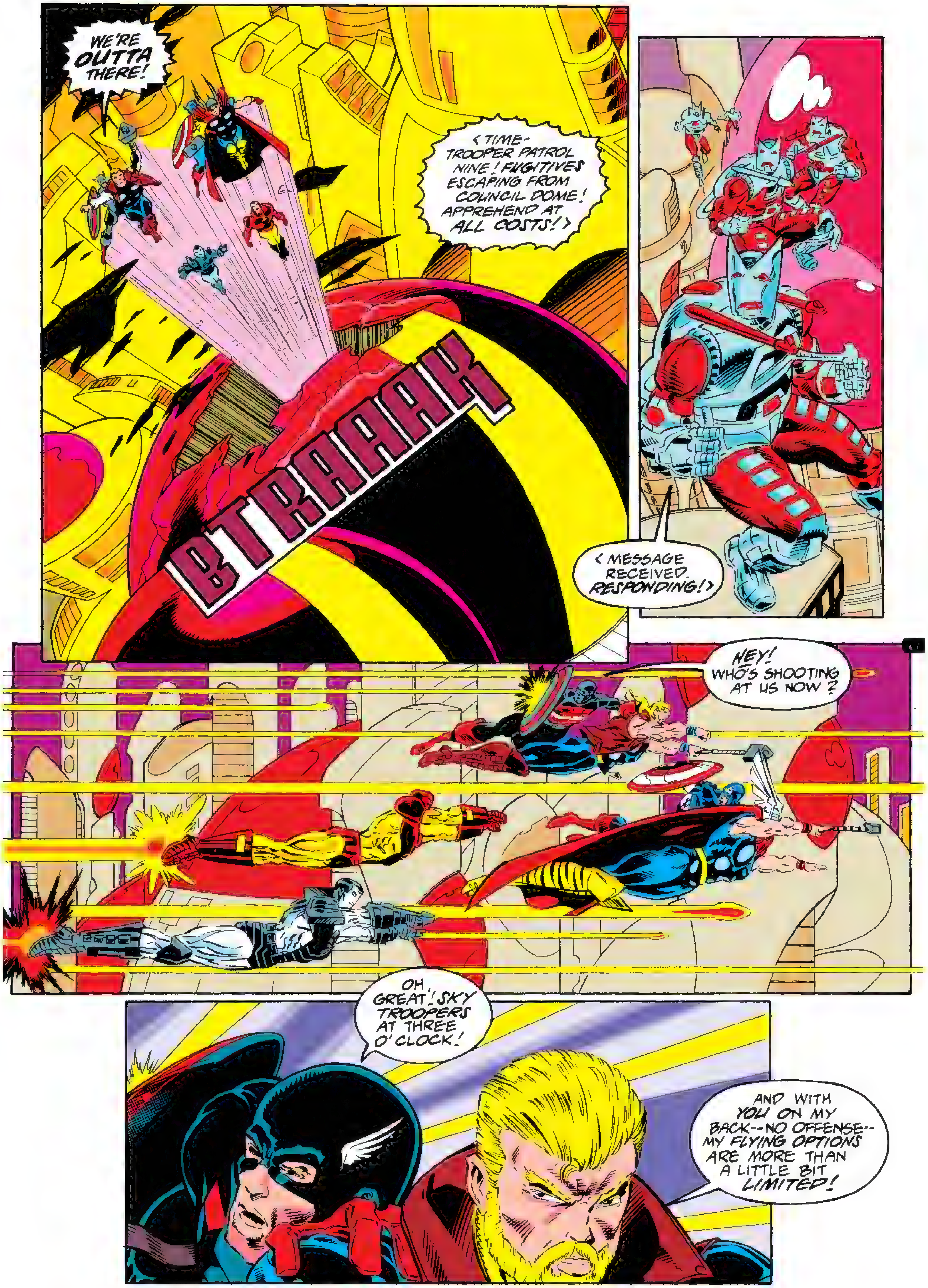
A TIMELY TALE BY THOSE MEN OF THE HOUR...
MARK GRUENWALD WRITER · **MIKE GUSTOVICH** PENCILER · **HUDSON & LAROSA** INKER · **STEVE DUTRO** LETTERER · **CHRIS MATTHYS** COLORIST · **RALPH MACCHIO** EDITOR · **TOM DEFALCO** TIMESPENDER

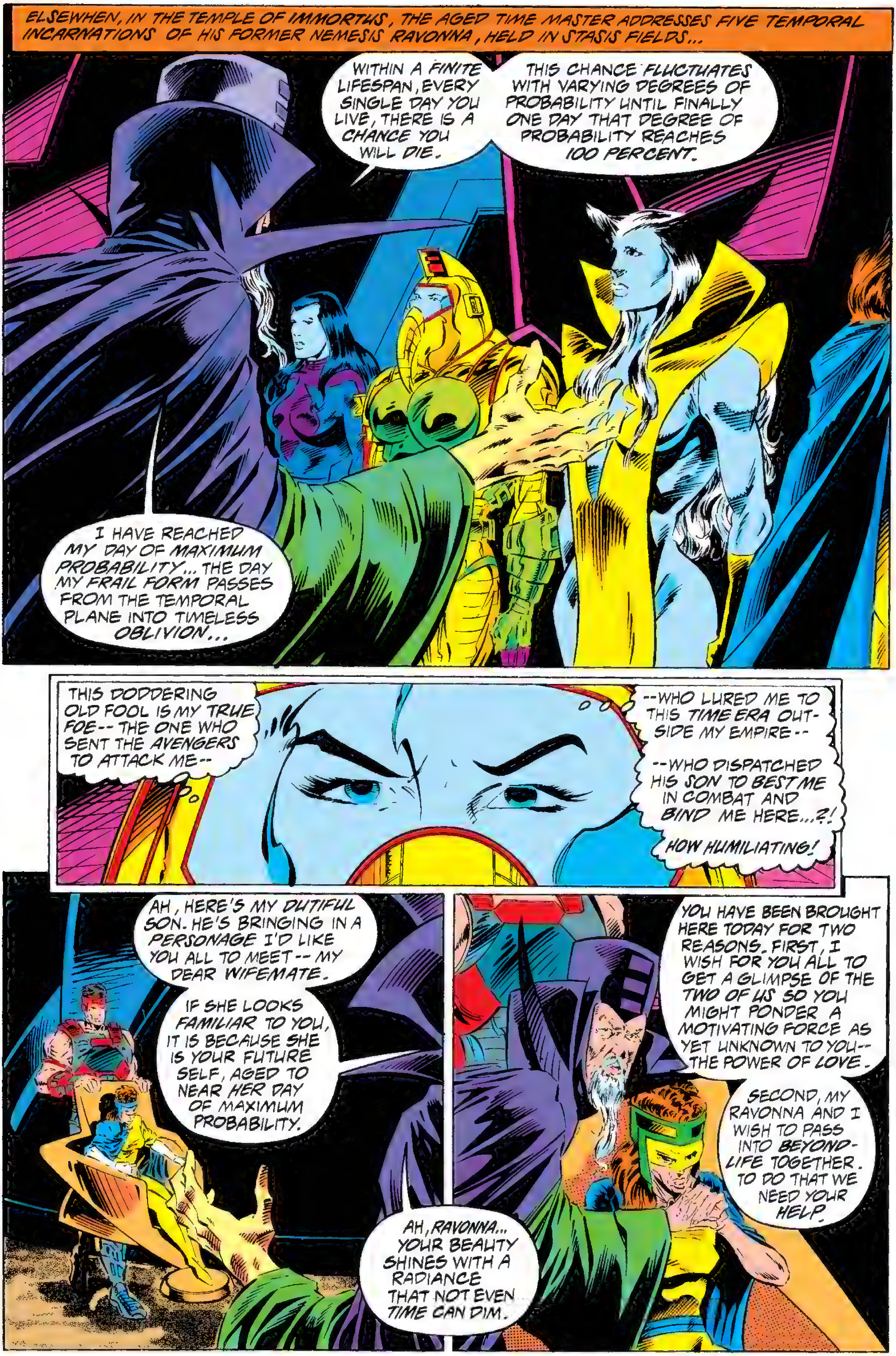

IN HALF THE DIVERGENT TIMELINES, VORT, THIS IS THE DAY CHRONOPOLIS FALLS.
REALITY WILL HENCEFORTH BE DEMARCATED BY THE EVENT THAT TRANSPIRES LATER THIS DAY.
OF THAT I AM AWARE, AST. DIVERGENCES AS SIGNIFICANT AS THIS ARE RARE.
PERHAPS THOSE TIMELINES WITHOUT KANG WILL FLOURISH AND PREDOMINATE THE CONTINUUM. WE SHALL SEE.
I AM GREATLY TEMPTED TO REVIVE KANG MYSELF. IT IS IN OUR BEST INTERESTS, AFTER ALL. THE PASSING OF CHRONOPOLIS DIMINISHES THE REALM OF INFLUENCE OF THE TIMEKEEPERS.
YOU CANNOT BE SERIOUS, VORT! DIRECT INTERVENTION IN THE COURSE OF EVENTS IS UNTHINKABLE FOR THOSE WITH TEMPORAL POWERS AS VAST AS OURS.
WE RISK CHRONO-SYNCLASTIC ENTROPY ENGULFING THIS ENTIRE SECTOR WERE WE TO HARNESS OUR ENERGIES.
I WAS SIMPLY MUSING ALOUD, ZANTH. I DID NOT MEAN TO INSPIRE INTERPERSONAL UNCERTAINTY.
VORT! AST! A QUASI-SENTIENT ENTITY NEARS.
IT IS KANG'S MECHANICAL SERVANT BRIDESHEAD.
IT GAZES UPON ITS MASTER EXPECTANTLY. DOES IT SIMPLY INQUIRE AS TO HIS CONDITION-- OR CAN IT REALIZE THAT THIS IS THE DAY KANG MUST RISE--
--SO CHRONOPOLIS DOES NOT FALL?

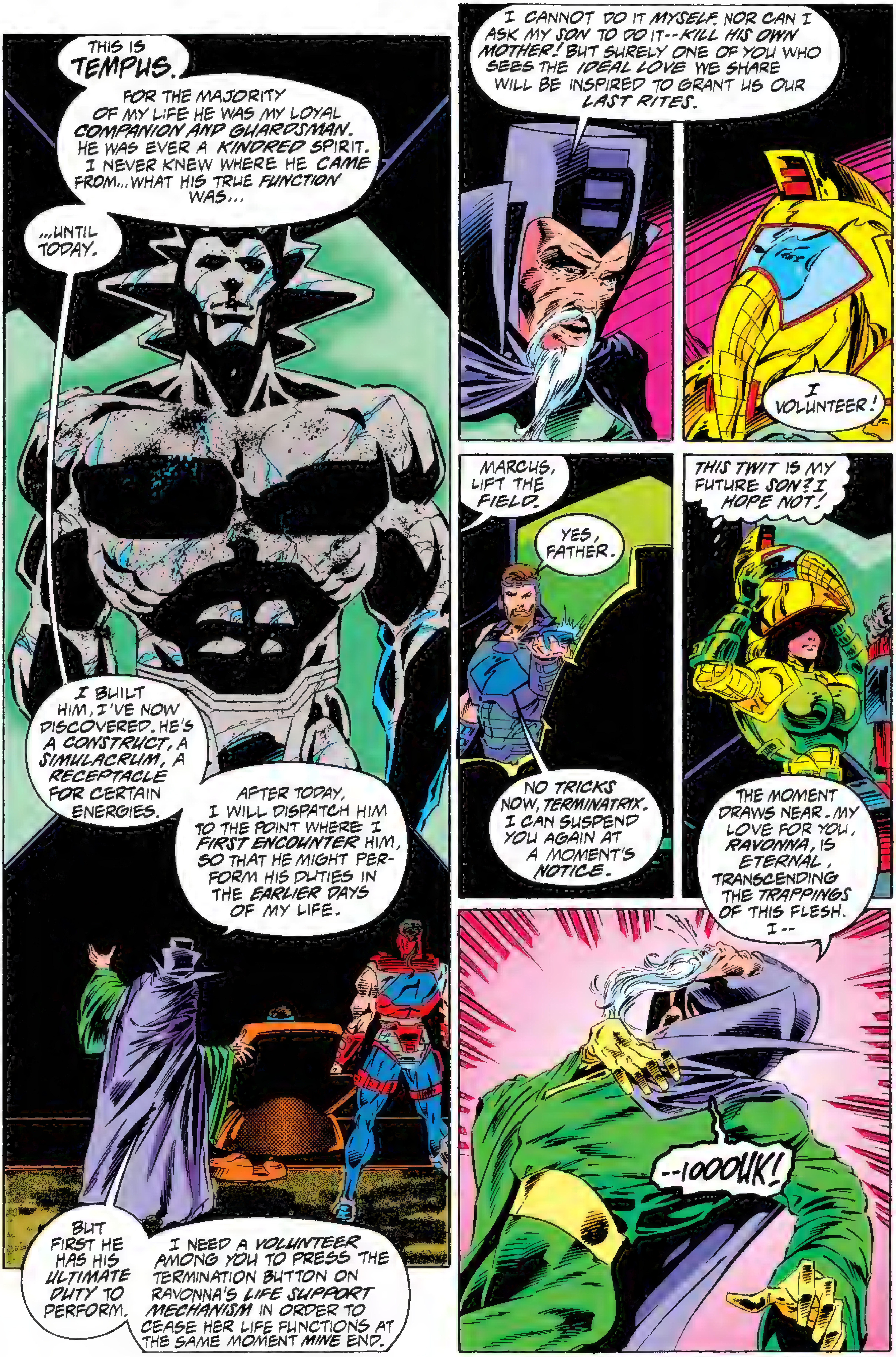

ELSEWHERE IN CHRONOPOLIS, IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY CHAMBER OF THE COUNCIL OF CROSSTIME KANGS, SIX 20th CENTURY HEROES MATERIALIZE BEFORE KANG'S 743 HAND-PICKED GOVERNORS OF HIS TIME-SPANNING TERRITORIES...
NEITHER SIDE IS THRILLED ABOUT IT.
THOSE ARE THE INFAMOUS AVENGERS!
THEY DARE DISRUPT OUR COUNCIL MEETING ?!
SOMEBODY'S JERKING OUR CHAIN, BOYS-- THIS ISN'T WHERE WE WANNA BE!
WHAT IS THIS-- KANG'S FAN CLUB?
BETTER FALL INTO POSITION! I THINK THEY'RE ABOUT TO ATTACK!
THEY MUST DIE IN THE NAME OF KANG!
I'M GETTING A LITTLE TIRED OF THIS.
IRON MAN
THUNDERSTRIKE
U.S. AGENT
WAR MACHINE
THOR
CAPTAIN AMERICA
Stan Lee PRESENTS:
DAY OF MAXIMUM PROBABILITY

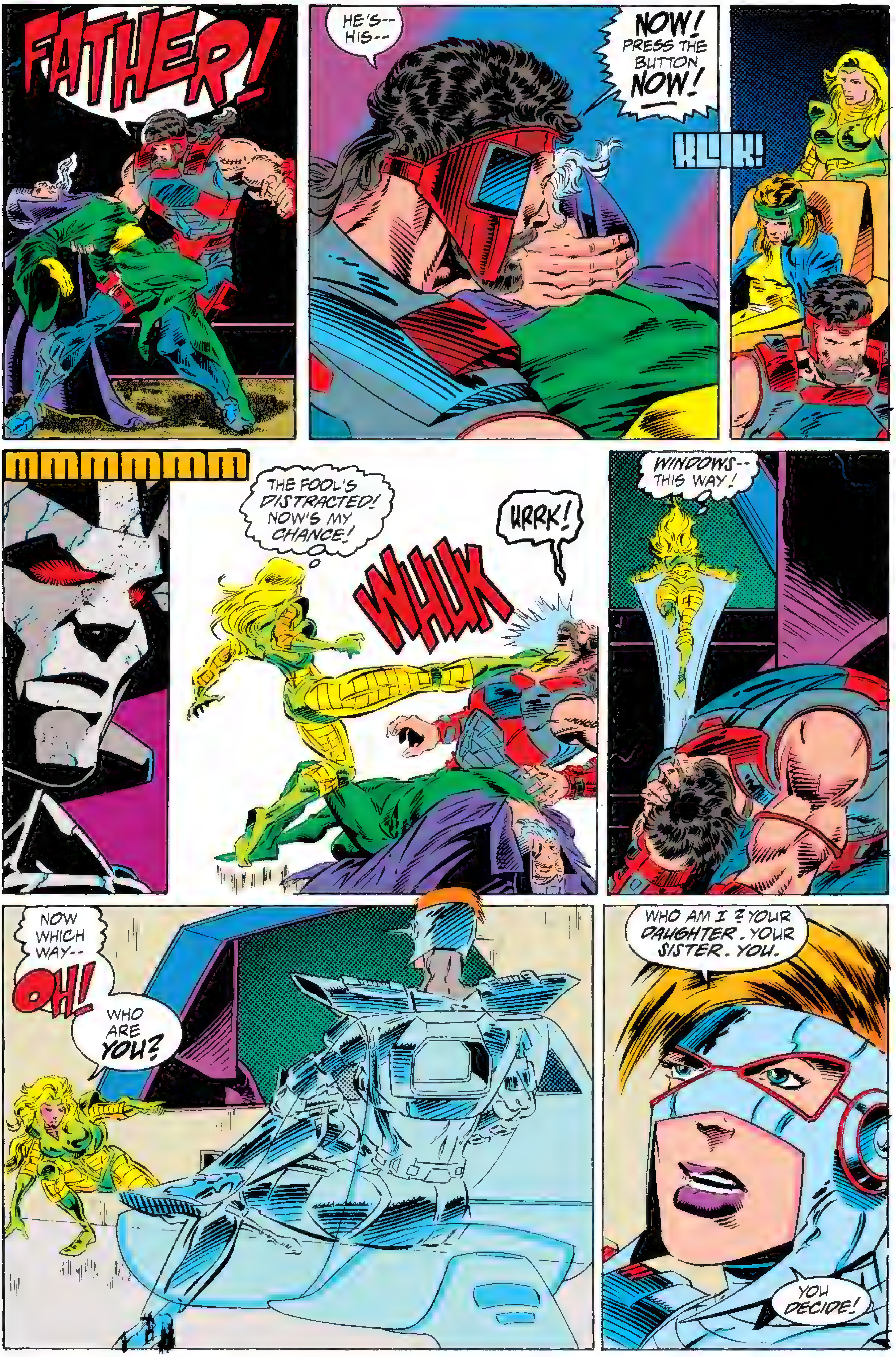
OBLITERATE THEM!
VWASH
FWAM
FOONT
VZASH
FOOMP
VRRRRRR
INCOMING!
PARTICLE BEAMS OF VARIOUS WAVELENGTHS! WE'VE GOT TO GET CLEAR BEFORE THE RAD-LEVELS GO CATASTROPHIC!
VWTANG

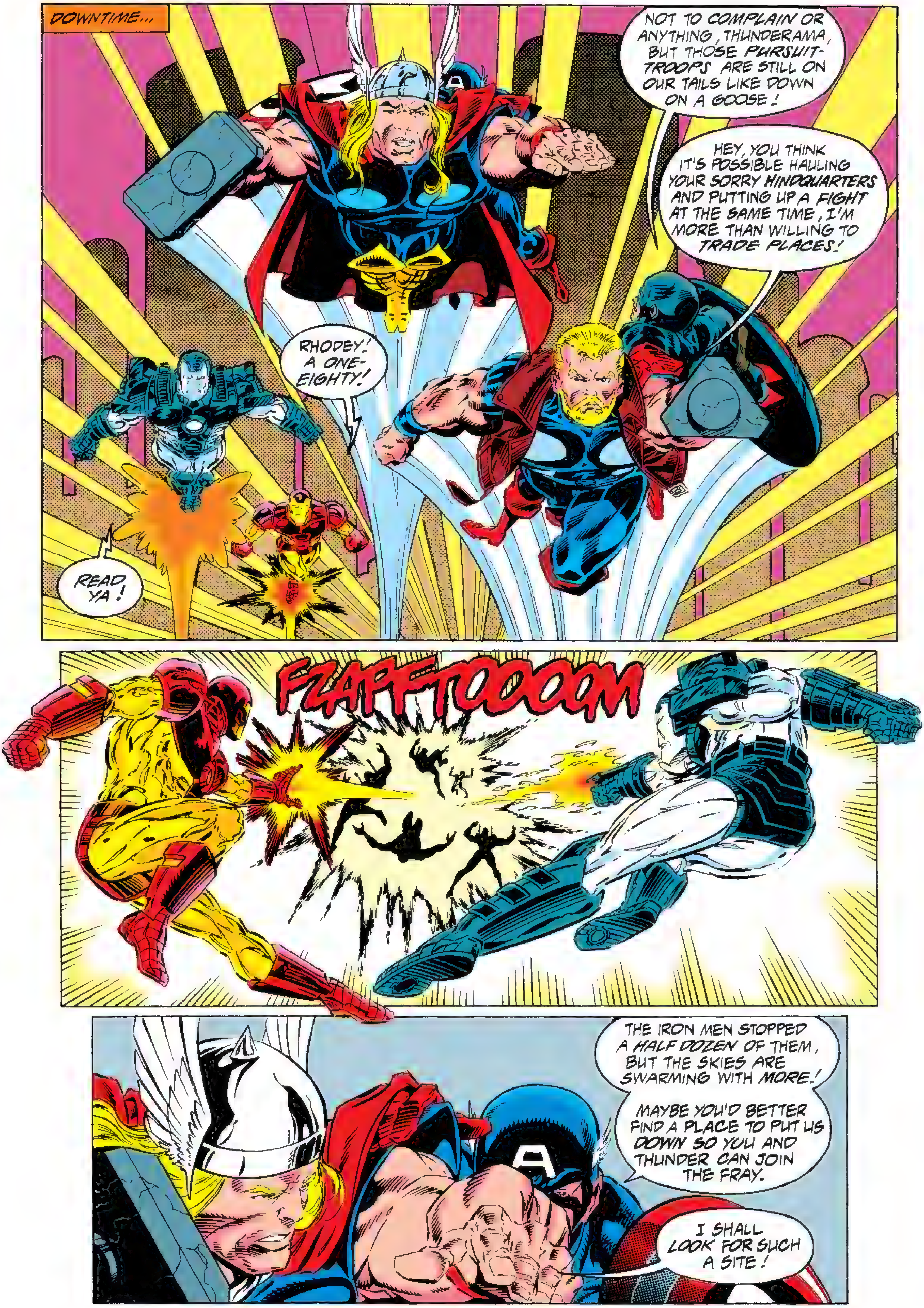

THIS IS A NO-WIN SITUATION! WE'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE! THE CEILING--?
GRAB ONTO MY BACK, CAPTAIN!
THUNDER, GET THE AGENT!
'TIS *UNSEEMLY* TO TURN OUR BACKS ON BATTLE LIKE THIS--!
NOT WHEN THE FIGHT WON'T *ACCOMPLISH* ANYTHING, THOR!
WHEN I GET MY HANDS ON *RAVONNA*--!
YOU'RE ASSUMING THAT *SHE* HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH THAT *SIDE JAUNT*, AGENT!
MAY BE YOUR GROUP'S SPONSOR--*REVELATION!*
HMMPH!

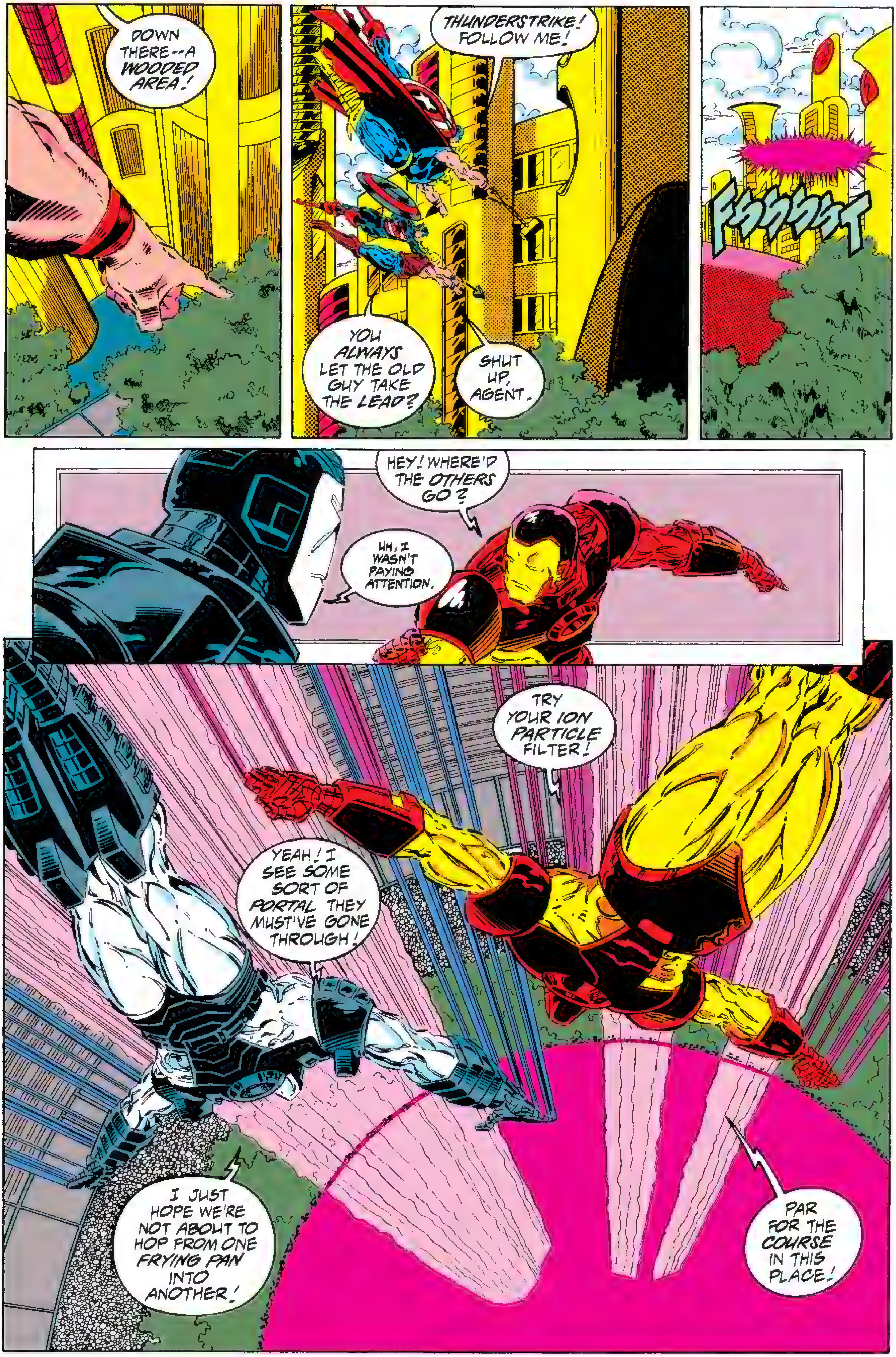

WE'RE OUTTA THERE!
< TIME-TROOPER PATROL NINE! FUGITIVES ESCAPING FROM COUNCIL DOME! APPREHEND AT ALL COSTS! >
BTRAAAK
< MESSAGE RECEIVED. RESPONDING! >
HEY! WHO'S SHOOTING AT US NOW?
OH GREAT! SKY TROOPERS AT THREE O' CLOCK!
AND WITH YOU ON MY BACK--NO OFFENSE--MY FLYING OPTIONS ARE MORE THAN A LITTLE BIT LIMITED!

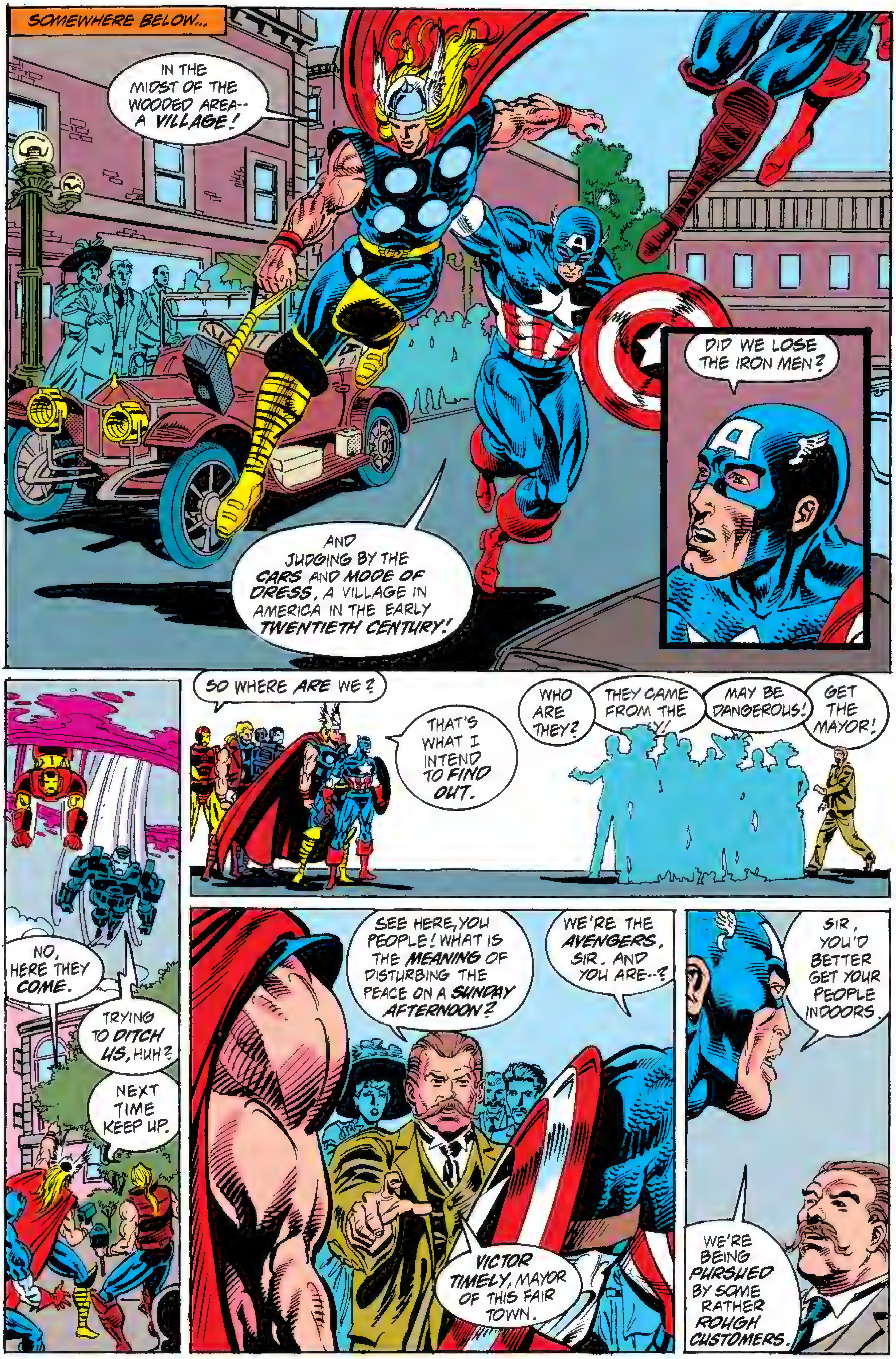

ELSEWHEN, IN THE TEMPLE OF IMMORTUS, THE AGED TIME MASTER ADDRESSES FIVE TEMPORAL INCARNATIONS OF HIS FORMER NEMESIS RAVONNA, HELD IN STASIS FIELDS...
WITHIN A FINITE LIFESPAN, EVERY SINGLE DAY YOU LIVE, THERE IS A CHANCE YOU WILL DIE.
THIS CHANCE FLUCTUATES WITH VARYING DEGREES OF PROBABILITY UNTIL FINALLY ONE DAY THAT DEGREE OF PROBABILITY REACHES 100 PERCENT.
I HAVE REACHED MY DAY OF MAXIMUM PROBABILITY... THE DAY MY FRAIL FORM PASSES FROM THE TEMPORAL PLANE INTO TIMELESS OBLIVION...
THIS DODDERING OLD FOOL IS MY TRUE FOE-- THE ONE WHO SENT THE AVENGERS TO ATTACK ME--
--WHO LURED ME TO THIS TIME ERA OUTSIDE MY EMPIRE--
--WHO DISPATCHED HIS SON TO BEST ME IN COMBAT AND BIND ME HERE...?!
HOW HUMILIATING!
AH, HERE'S MY DUTIFUL SON. HE'S BRINGING IN A PERSONAGE I'D LIKE YOU ALL TO MEET-- MY DEAR WIFEMATE.
IF SHE LOOKS FAMILIAR TO YOU, IT IS BECAUSE SHE IS YOUR FUTURE SELF, AGED TO NEAR HER DAY OF MAXIMUM PROBABILITY.
AH, RAVONNA... YOUR BEAUTY SHINES WITH A RADIANCE THAT NOT EVEN TIME CAN DIM.
YOU HAVE BEEN BROUGHT HERE TODAY FOR TWO REASONS. FIRST, I WISH FOR YOU ALL TO GET A GLIMPSE OF THE TWO OF US SO YOU MIGHT PONDER A MOTIVATING FORCE AS YET UNKNOWN TO YOU-- THE POWER OF LOVE.
SECOND, MY RAVONNA AND I WISH TO PASS INTO BEYOND-LIFE TOGETHER. TO DO THAT WE NEED YOUR HELP.

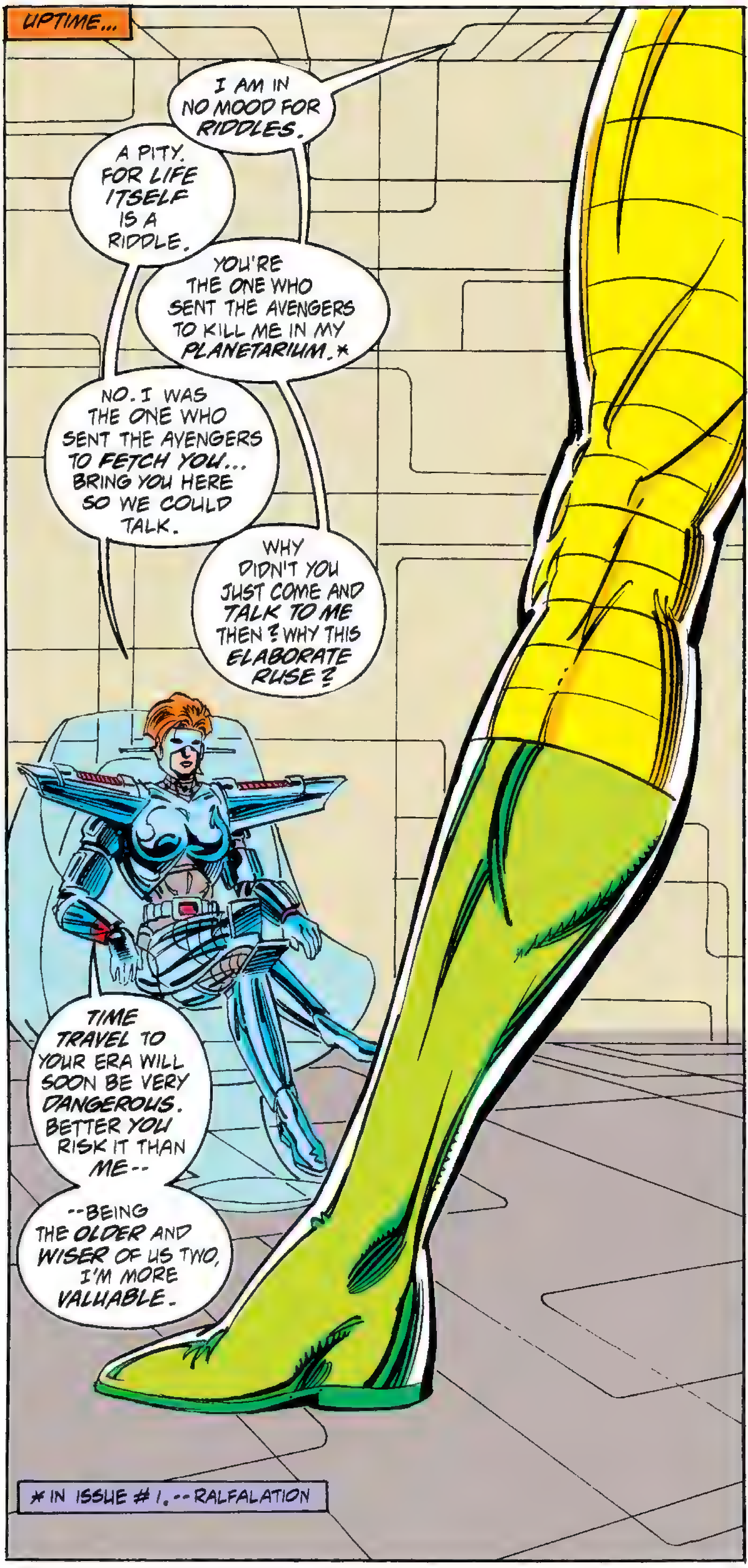

THIS IS TEMPUS.
FOR THE MAJORITY OF MY LIFE HE WAS MY LOYAL COMPANION AND GUARDSMAN. HE WAS EVER A KINDRED SPIRIT. I NEVER KNEW WHERE HE CAME FROM...WHAT HIS TRUE FUNCTION WAS...
...UNTIL TODAY.
I BUILT HIM, I'VE NOW DISCOVERED. HE'S A CONSTRUCT, A SIMULACRUM, A RECEPTACLE FOR CERTAIN ENERGIES.
AFTER TODAY, I WILL DISPATCH HIM TO THE POINT WHERE I FIRST ENCOUNTER HIM, SO THAT HE MIGHT PERFORM HIS DUTIES IN THE EARLIER DAYS OF MY LIFE.
BUT FIRST HE HAS HIS ULTIMATE DUTY TO PERFORM.
I NEED A VOLUNTEER AMONG YOU TO PRESS THE TERMINATION BUTTON ON RAVONNA'S LIFE SUPPORT MECHANISM IN ORDER TO CEASE HER LIFE FUNCTIONS AT THE SAME MOMENT MINE END.
I CANNOT DO IT MYSELF, NOR CAN I ASK MY SON TO DO IT--KILL HIS OWN MOTHER! BUT SURELY ONE OF YOU WHO SEES THE IDEAL LOVE WE SHARE WILL BE INSPIRED TO GRANT US OUR LAST RITES.
I VOLUNTEER!
MARCUS, LIFT THE FIELD.
YES, FATHER.
NO TRICKS NOW, TERMINATRIX. I CAN SUSPEND YOU AGAIN AT A MOMENT'S NOTICE.
THIS TWIT IS MY FUTURE SON? I HOPE NOT!
THE MOMENT DRAWS NEAR. MY LOVE FOR YOU, RAVONNA, IS ETERNAL, TRANSCENDING THE TRAPPINGS OF THIS FLESH. I--
--IOOOUK!

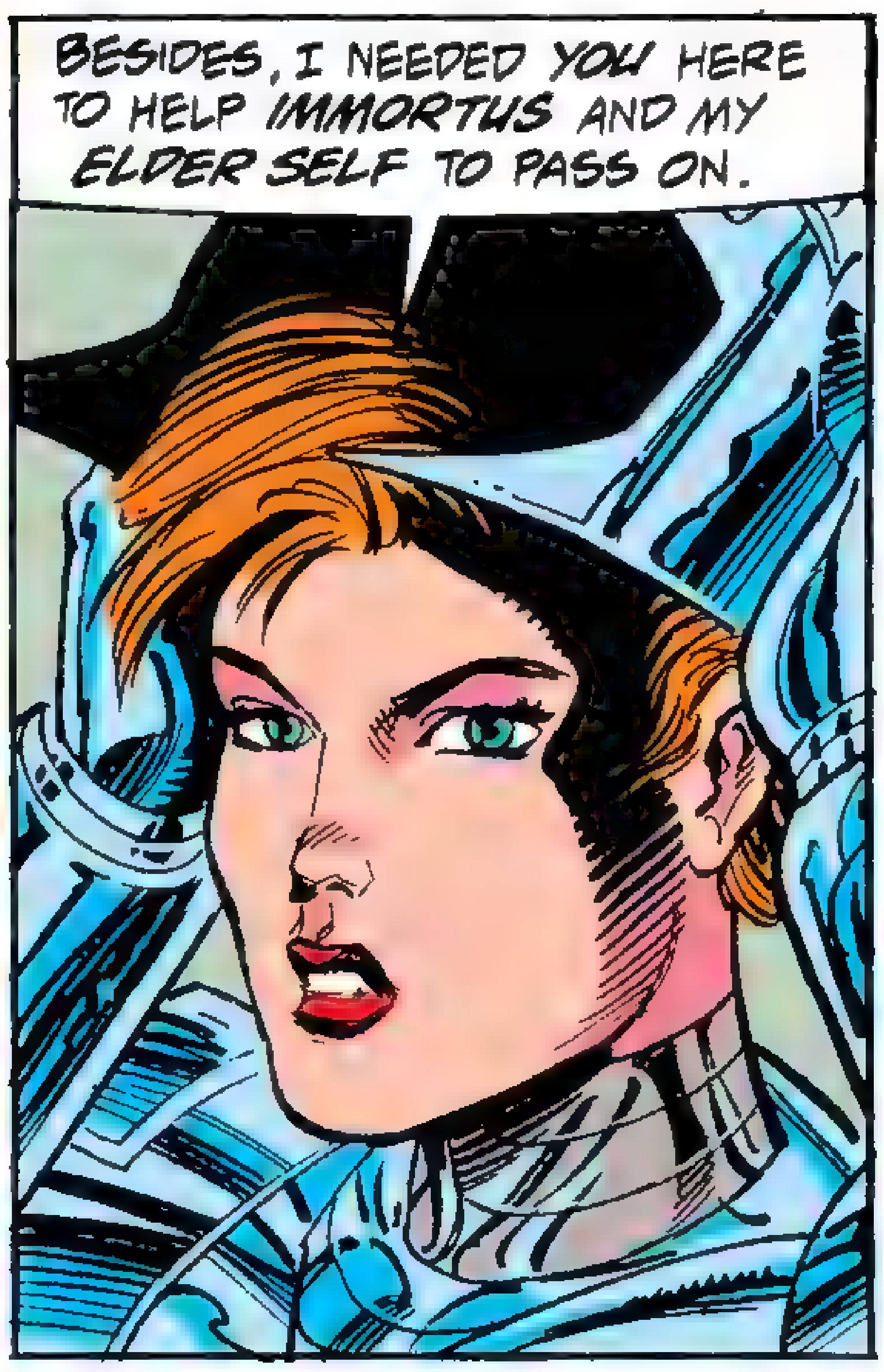

FATHER!
HE'S-- HIS--
NOW! PRESS THE BUTTON NOW!
KLIK!
MMMMMMM
THE FOOL'S DISTRACTED! NOW'S MY CHANCE!
WHUK
URRK!
WINDOWS-- THIS WAY!
NOW WHICH WAY--
OH!
WHO ARE YOU?
WHO AM I? YOUR DAUGHTER. YOUR SISTER. YOU.
YOU DECIDE!

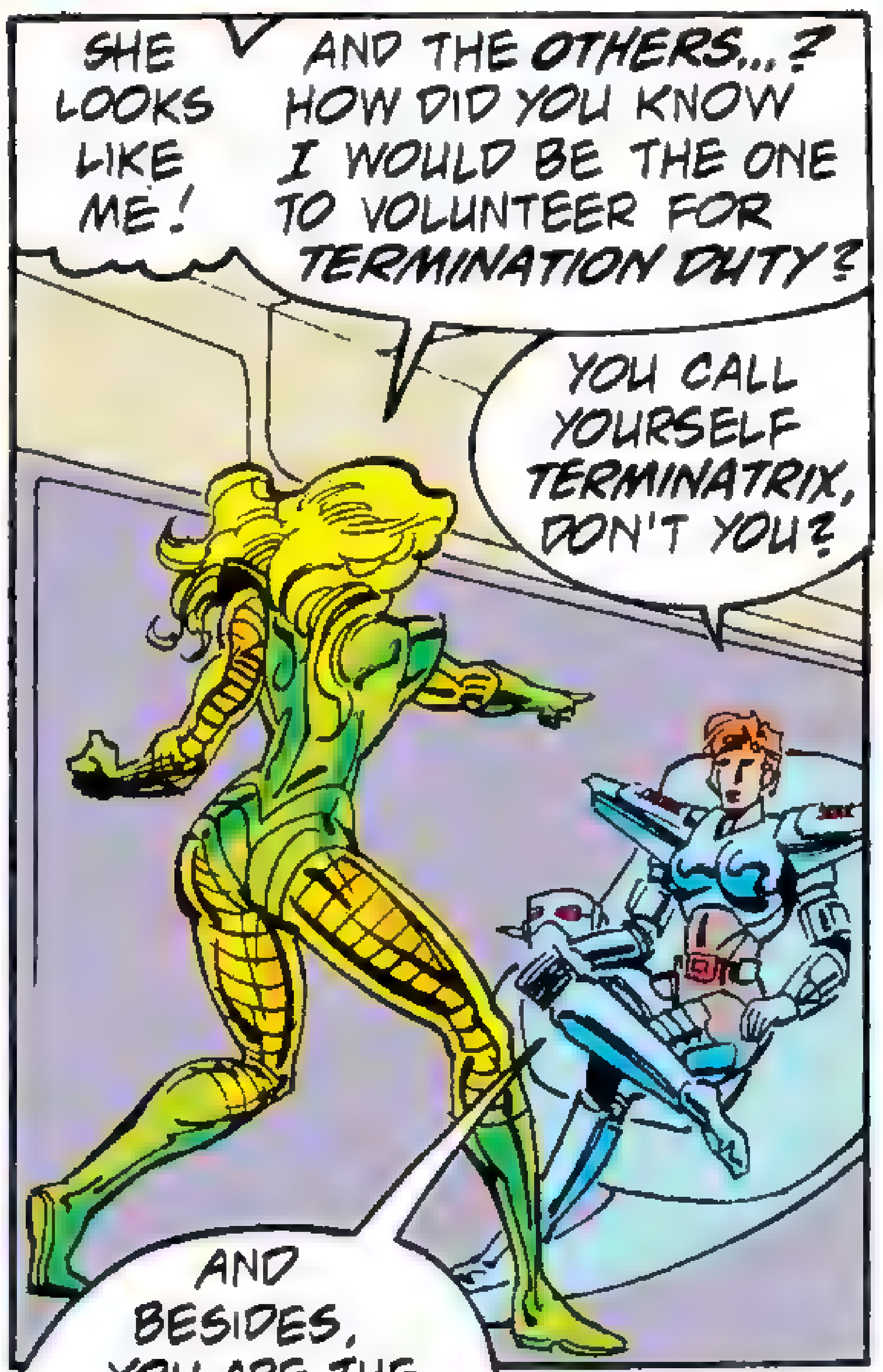

DOWNTIME...
NOT TO COMPLAIN OR ANYTHING, THUNDERAMA, BUT THOSE PURSUIT-TROOPS ARE STILL ON OUR TAILS LIKE DOWN ON A GOOSE!
HEY, YOU THINK IT'S POSSIBLE HAULING YOUR SORRY HINDQUARTERS AND PUTTING UP A FIGHT AT THE SAME TIME, I'M MORE THAN WILLING TO TRADE PLACES!
RHODEY! A ONE-EIGHTY!
READ YA!
FZAPFTOOOOM
THE IRON MEN STOPPED A HALF DOZEN OF THEM, BUT THE SKIES ARE SWARMING WITH MORE!
MAYBE YOU'D BETTER FIND A PLACE TO PUT US DOWN SO YOU AND THUNDER CAN JOIN THE FRAY.
I SHALL LOOK FOR SUCH A SITE!

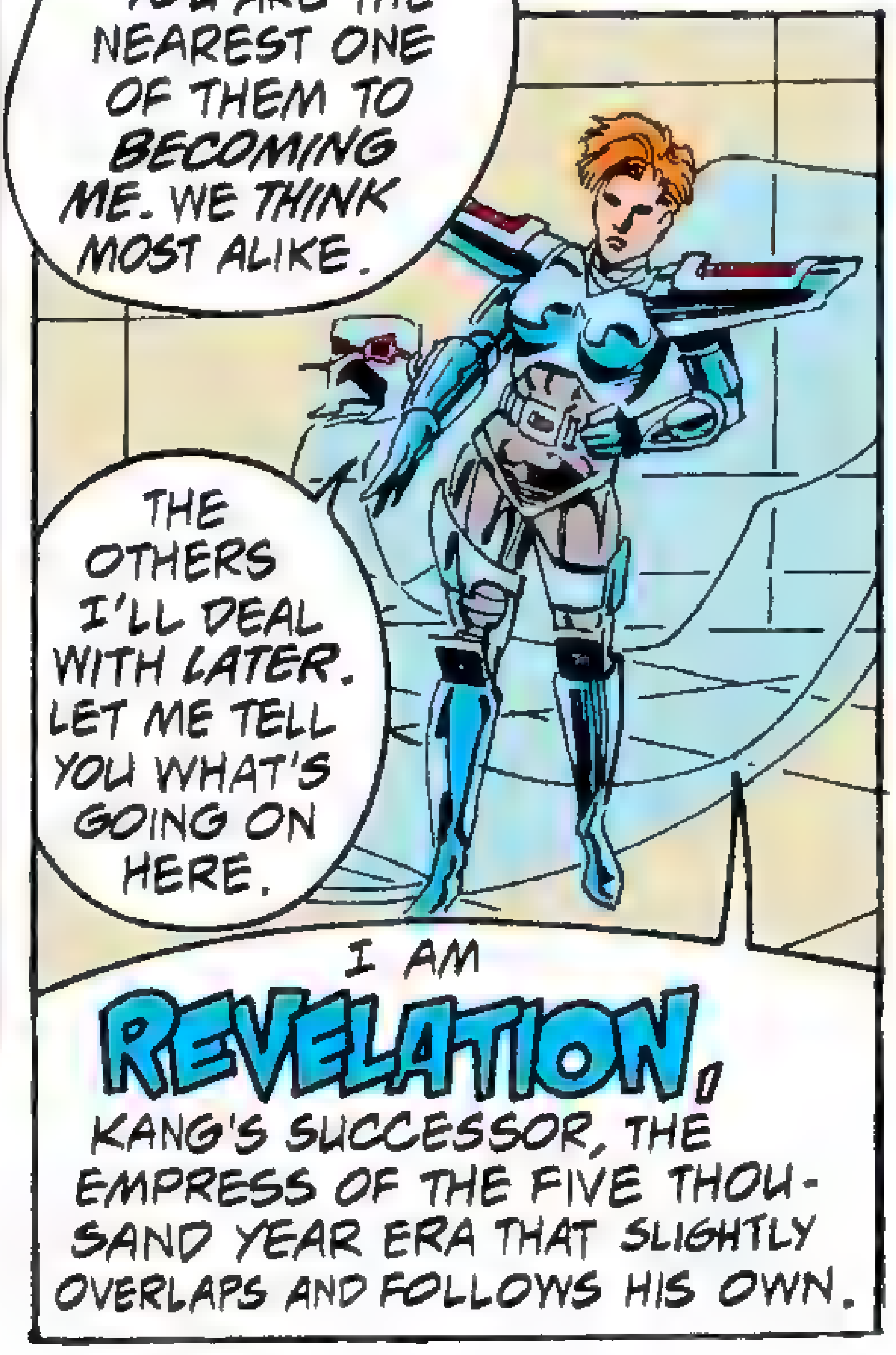

DOWN THERE--A WOODED AREA!
THUNDERSTRIKE! FOLLOW ME!
YOU ALWAYS LET THE OLD GUY TAKE THE LEAD?
SHUT UP, AGENT.
FSSSST
HEY! WHERE'D THE OTHERS GO?
UH, I WASN'T PAYING ATTENTION.
TRY YOUR ION PARTICLE FILTER!
YEAH! I SEE SOME SORT OF PORTAL THEY MUST'VE GONE THROUGH!
I JUST HOPE WE'RE NOT ABOUT TO HOP FROM ONE FRYING PAN INTO ANOTHER!
PAR FOR THE COURSE IN THIS PLACE!

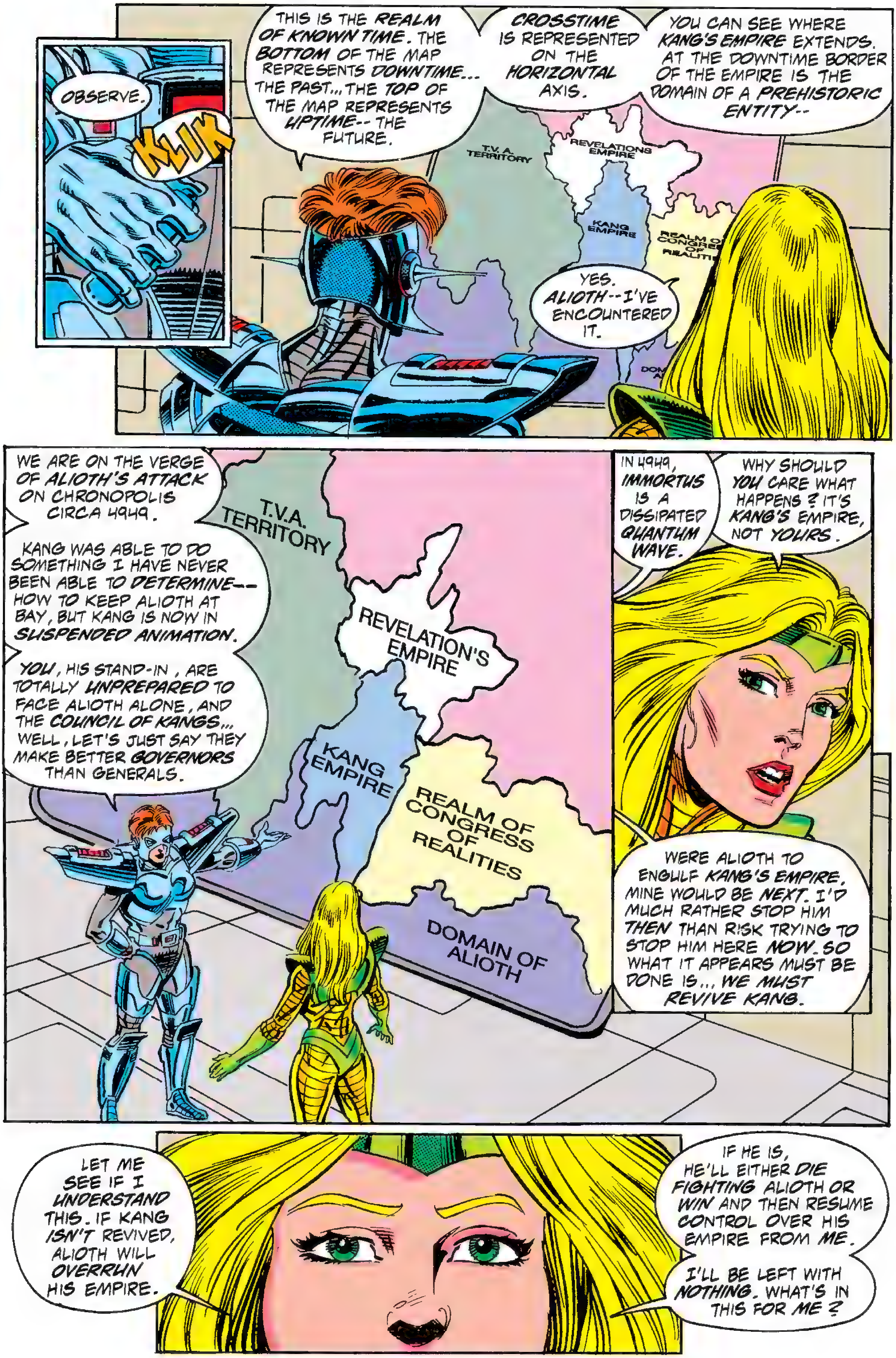

SOMEWHERE BELOW...
IN THE MIDST OF THE WOODED AREA-- A VILLAGE!
AND JUDGING BY THE CARS AND MODE OF DRESS, A VILLAGE IN AMERICA IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY!
DID WE LOSE THE IRON MEN?
NO, HERE THEY COME.
TRYING TO DITCH US, HUH?
NEXT TIME KEEP UP.
SO WHERE ARE WE?
THAT'S WHAT I INTEND TO FIND OUT.
WHO ARE THEY?
THEY CAME FROM THE Y!
MAY BE DANGEROUS!
GET THE MAYOR!
SEE HERE, YOU PEOPLE! WHAT IS THE MEANING OF DISTURBING THE PEACE ON A SUNDAY AFTERNOON?
WE'RE THE AVENGERS, SIR. AND YOU ARE--?
VICTOR TIMELY, MAYOR OF THIS FAIR TOWN.
SIR, YOU'D BETTER GET YOUR PEOPLE INDOORS.
WE'RE BEING PURSUED BY SOME RATHER ROUGH CUSTOMERS.

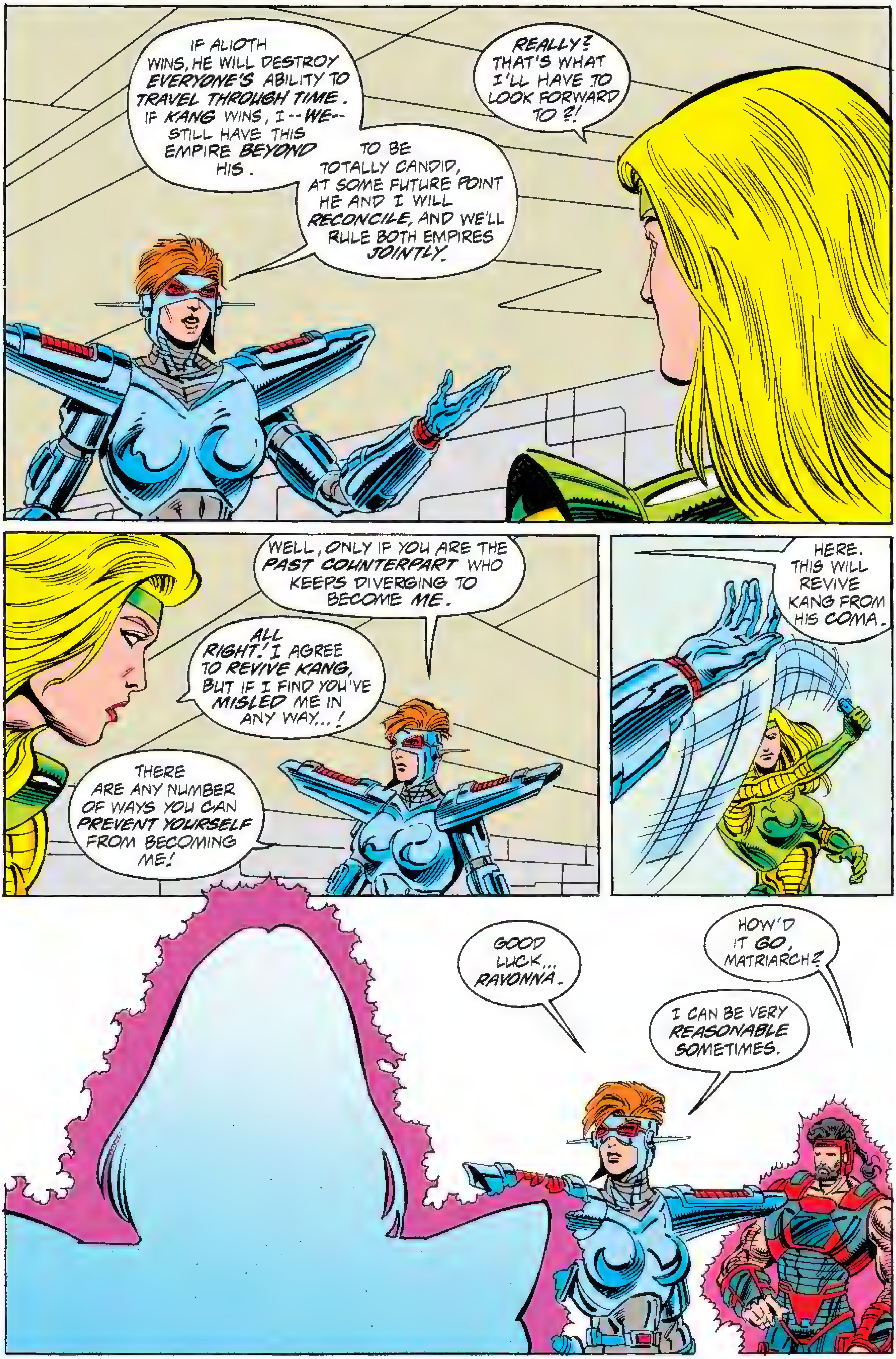

UPTIME...
I AM IN NO MOOD FOR *RIDDLES*.
A PITY. FOR *LIFE ITSELF* IS A RIDDLE.
YOU'RE THE ONE WHO SENT THE AVENGERS TO KILL ME IN MY *PLANETARIUM*.*
NO. I WAS THE ONE WHO SENT THE AVENGERS TO *FETCH YOU*... BRING YOU HERE SO WE COULD TALK.
WHY DIDN'T YOU JUST COME AND *TALK TO ME* THEN? WHY THIS *ELABORATE RUSE*?
TIME TRAVEL TO YOUR ERA WILL SOON BE VERY *DANGEROUS*. BETTER *YOU* RISK IT THAN *ME*--
--BEING THE *OLDER* AND *WISER* OF US TWO, I'M MORE *VALUABLE*.
* IN ISSUE #1. --RALFALATION

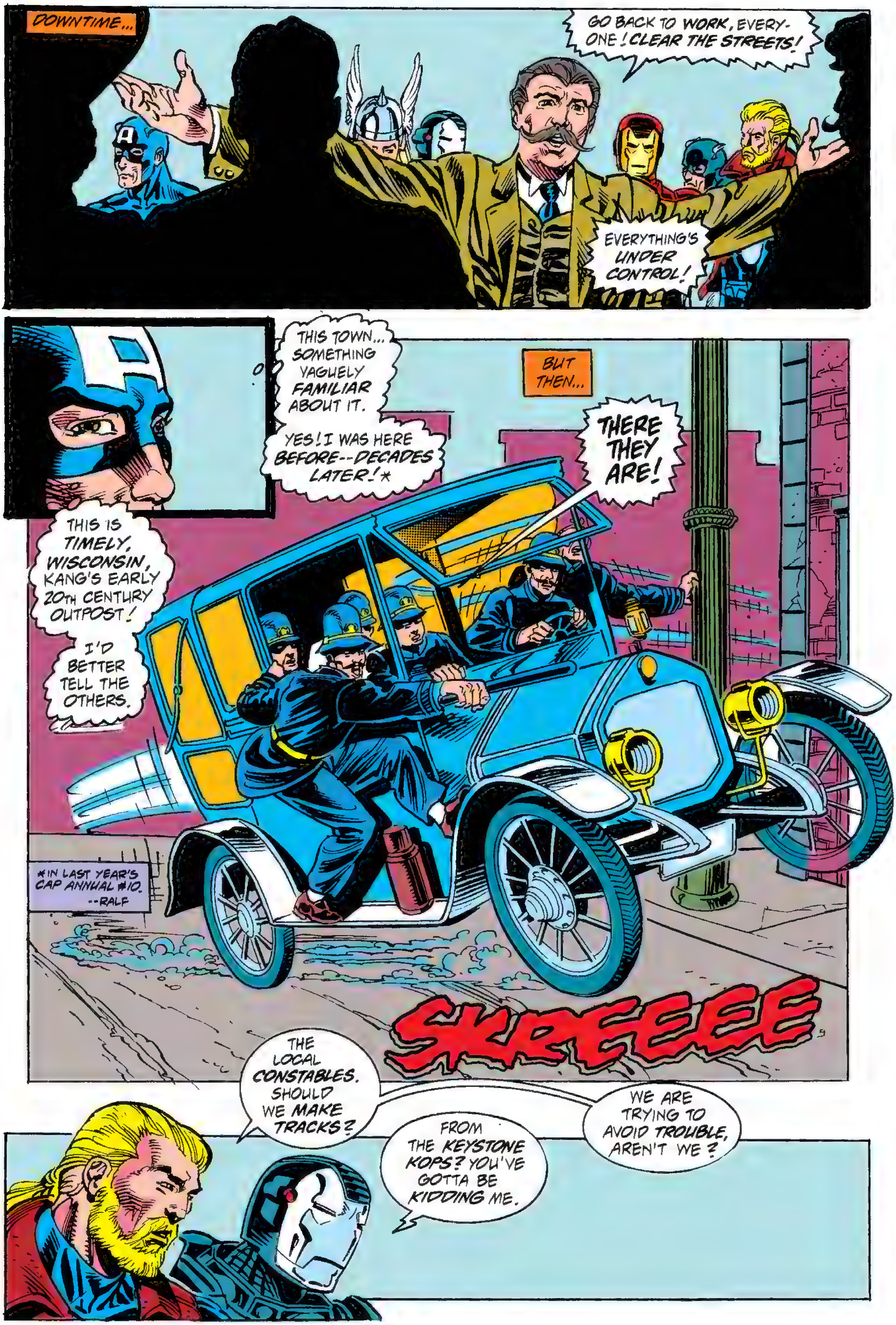

BESIDES, I NEEDED *YOU* HERE TO HELP *IMMORTUS* AND MY *ELDER SELF* TO PASS ON.

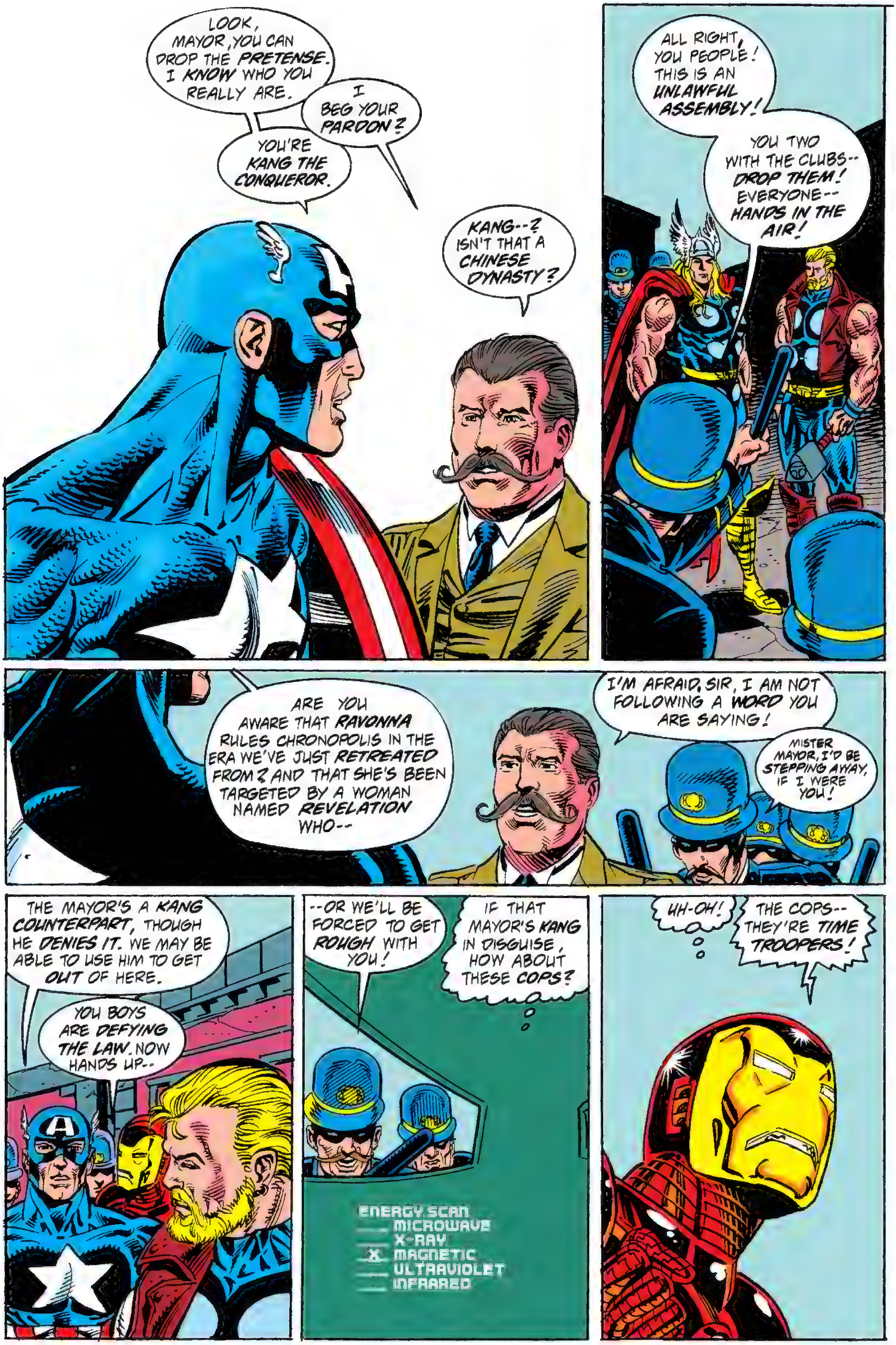

SHE LOOKS LIKE ME!
AND THE *OTHERS*...? HOW DID YOU KNOW *I* WOULD BE THE ONE TO VOLUNTEER FOR *TERMINATION DUTY*?
YOU CALL YOURSELF *TERMINATRIX*, DON'T YOU?
AND BESIDES, *YOU* ARE THE NEAREST ONE OF THEM TO *BECOMING ME*. WE *THINK* MOST ALIKE.

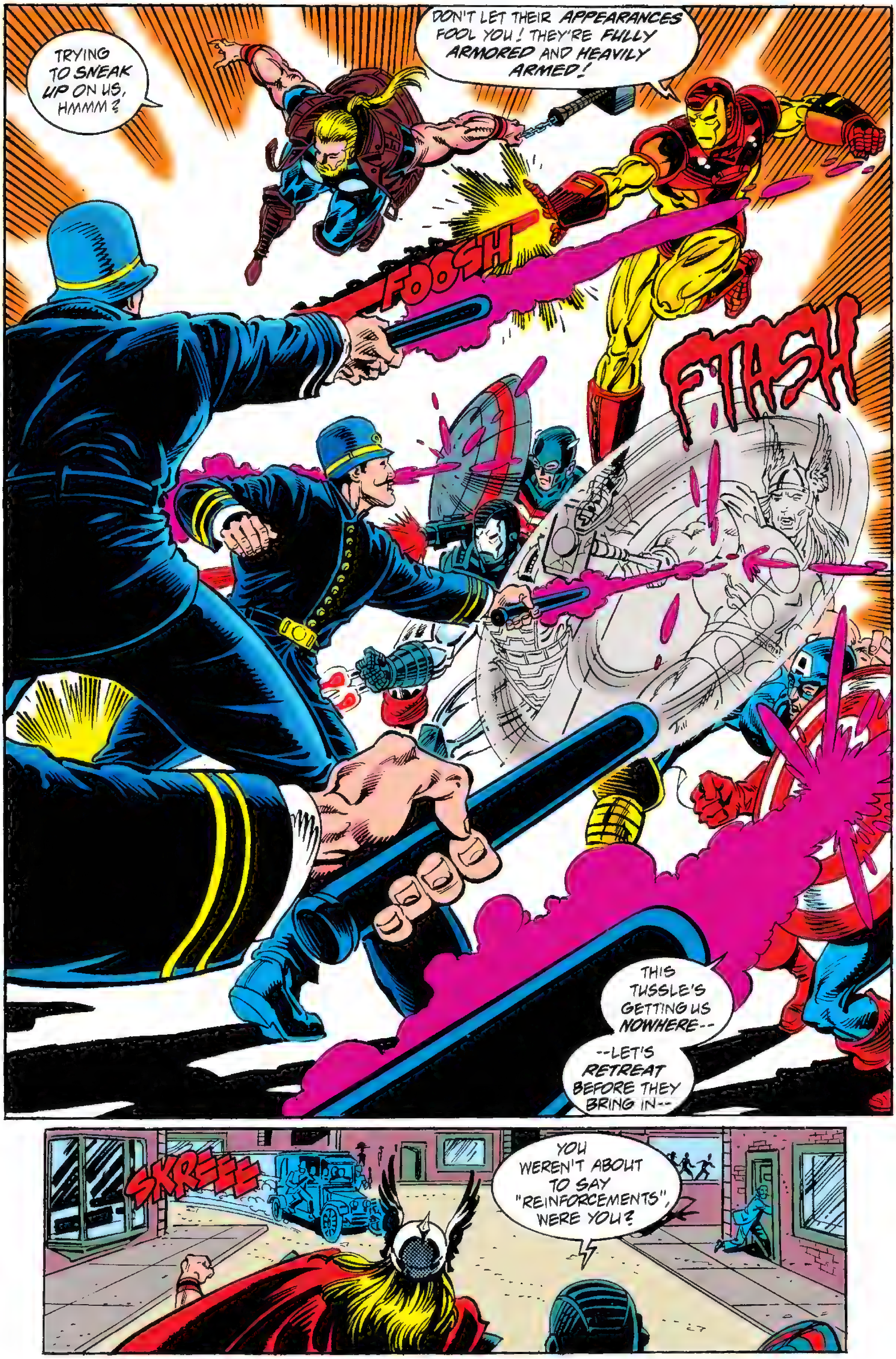

THE OTHERS I'LL DEAL WITH *LATER*. LET ME TELL YOU WHAT'S GOING ON HERE.
I AM **REVELATION**, KANG'S SUCCESSOR, THE EMPRESS OF THE FIVE THOUSAND YEAR ERA THAT SLIGHTLY OVERLAPS AND FOLLOWS HIS OWN.

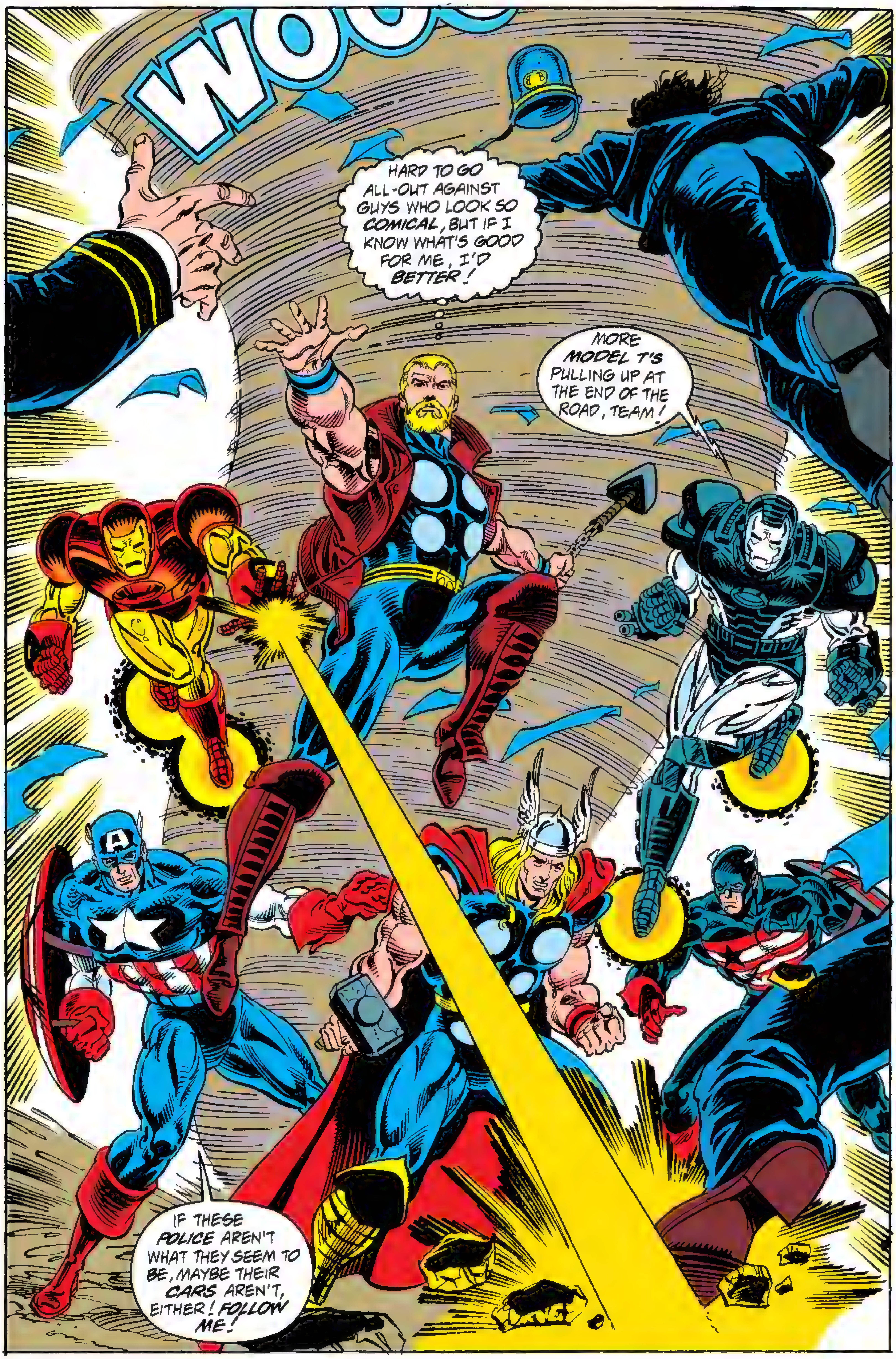

OBSERVE.
KLIK
THIS IS THE **REALM OF KNOWN TIME**. THE **BOTTOM** OF THE MAP REPRESENTS **DOWNTIME**... THE PAST... THE **TOP** OF THE MAP REPRESENTS **UPTIME**-- THE FUTURE.
CROSSTIME IS REPRESENTED ON THE **HORIZONTAL** AXIS.
YOU CAN SEE WHERE **KANG'S EMPIRE** EXTENDS. AT THE DOWNTIME BORDER OF THE EMPIRE IS THE DOMAIN OF A **PREHISTORIC ENTITY**--
T.V.A. TERRITORY
REVELATIONS EMPIRE
KANG EMPIRE
YES. **ALIOTH**--I'VE ENCOUNTERED IT.
WE ARE ON THE VERGE OF **ALIOTH'S ATTACK** ON CHRONOPOLIS CIRCA 4949.
KANG WAS ABLE TO DO SOMETHING I HAVE NEVER BEEN ABLE TO **DETERMINE**-- HOW TO KEEP ALIOTH AT BAY, BUT KANG IS NOW IN **SUSPENDED ANIMATION**.
YOU, HIS STAND-IN, ARE TOTALLY **UNPREPARED** TO FACE ALIOTH ALONE, AND THE **COUNCIL OF KANGS**... WELL, LET'S JUST SAY THEY MAKE BETTER **GOVERNORS** THAN GENERALS.
T.V.A. TERRITORY
REVELATION'S EMPIRE
KANG EMPIRE
REALM OF CONGRESS OF REALITIES
DOMAIN OF ALIOTH
IN 4949, **IMMORTUS** IS A DISSIPATED **QUANTUM WAVE**.
WHY SHOULD **YOU** CARE WHAT HAPPENS? IT'S **KANG'S** EMPIRE, NOT **YOURS**.
WERE ALIOTH TO ENGULF **KANG'S EMPIRE**, MINE WOULD BE **NEXT**. I'D MUCH RATHER STOP HIM **THEN** THAN RISK TRYING TO STOP HIM HERE **NOW**. SO WHAT IT APPEARS MUST BE DONE IS... **WE MUST REVIVE KANG**.
LET ME SEE IF I **UNDERSTAND** THIS. IF KANG **ISN'T** REVIVED, ALIOTH WILL **OVERRUN** HIS EMPIRE.
IF HE IS, HE'LL EITHER **DIE FIGHTING** ALIOTH OR **WIN** AND THEN RESUME CONTROL OVER HIS EMPIRE FROM **ME**.
I'LL BE LEFT WITH **NOTHING**. WHAT'S IN THIS FOR **ME**?

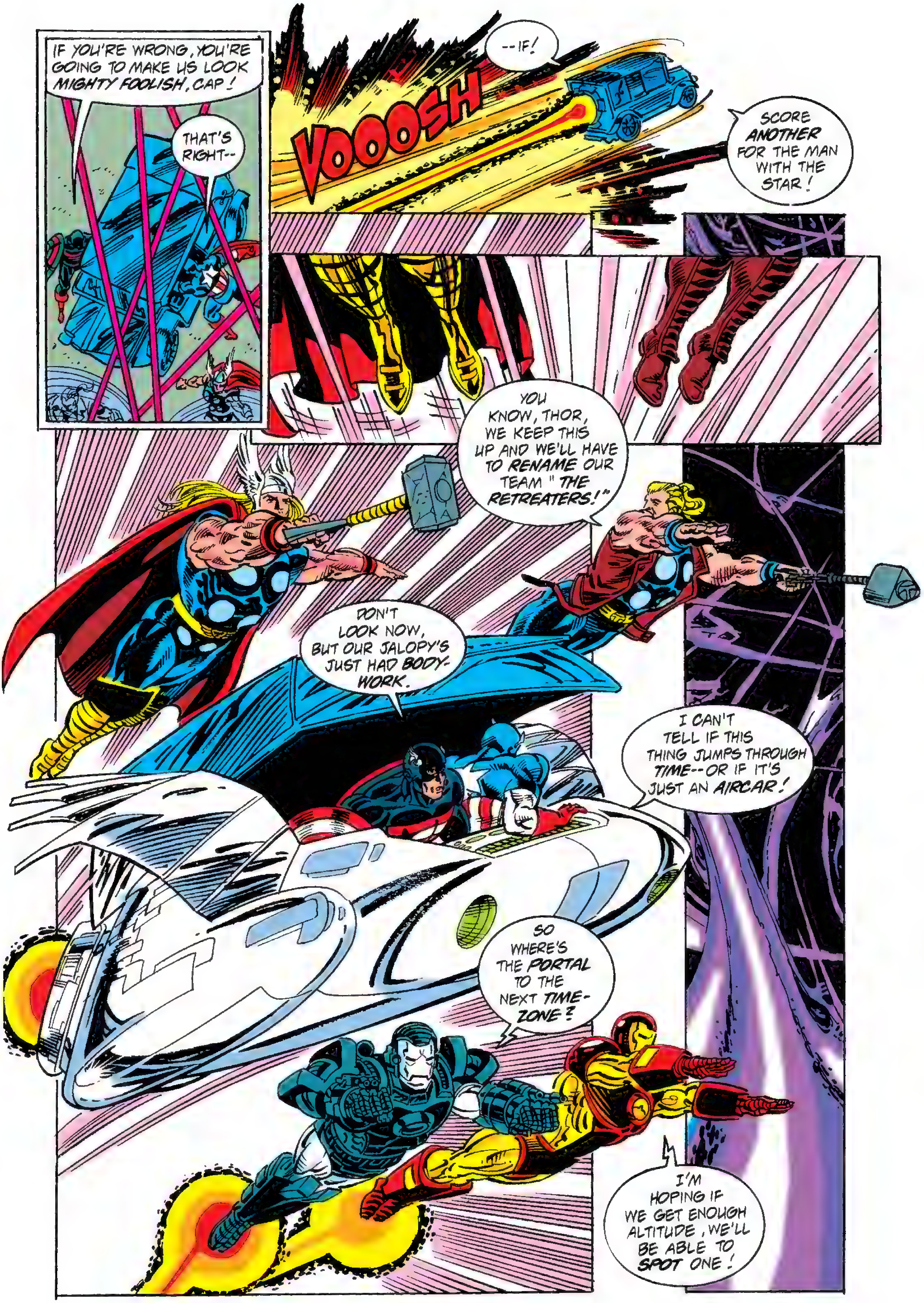

IF ALIOTH WINS, HE WILL DESTROY EVERYONE'S ABILITY TO TRAVEL THROUGH TIME. IF KANG WINS, I--WE--STILL HAVE THIS EMPIRE BEYOND HIS.
TO BE TOTALLY CANDID, AT SOME FUTURE POINT HE AND I WILL RECONCILE, AND WE'LL RULE BOTH EMPIRES JOINTLY.
REALLY? THAT'S WHAT I'LL HAVE TO LOOK FORWARD TO?!
WELL, ONLY IF YOU ARE THE PAST COUNTERPART WHO KEEPS DIVERGING TO BECOME ME.
ALL RIGHT! I AGREE TO REVIVE KANG, BUT IF I FIND YOU'VE MISLED ME IN ANY WAY...!
THERE ARE ANY NUMBER OF WAYS YOU CAN PREVENT YOURSELF FROM BECOMING ME!
HERE. THIS WILL REVIVE KANG FROM HIS COMA.
GOOD LUCK... RAVONNA.
HOW'D IT GO, MATRIARCH?
I CAN BE VERY REASONABLE SOMETIMES.

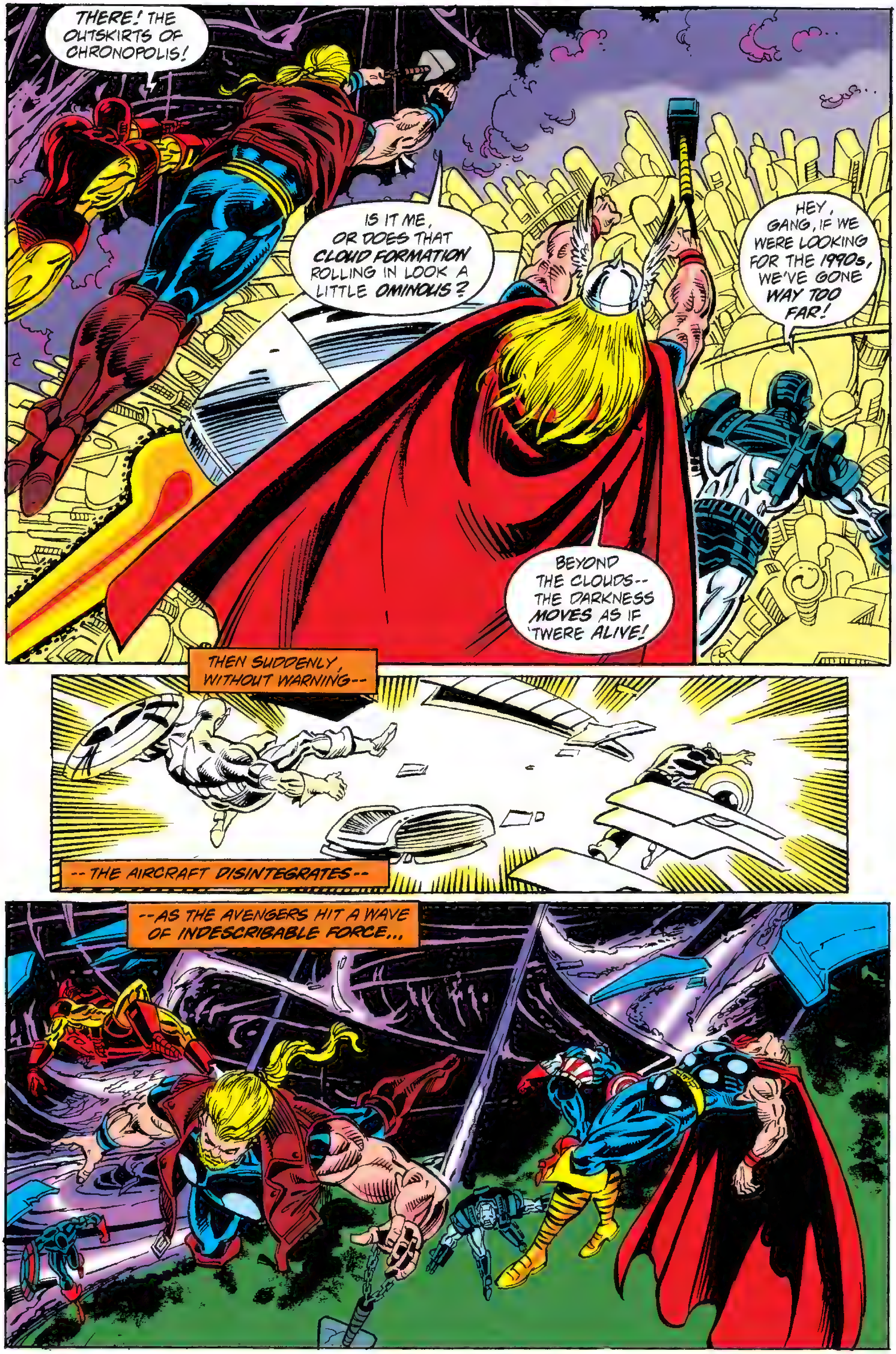

DOWNTIME...
GO BACK TO WORK, EVERYONE! CLEAR THE STREETS!
EVERYTHING'S UNDER CONTROL!
THIS TOWN... SOMETHING VAGUELY FAMILIAR ABOUT IT.
YES! I WAS HERE BEFORE--DECADES LATER!*
BUT THEN...
THERE THEY ARE!
THIS IS TIMELY, WISCONSIN, KANG'S EARLY 20TH CENTURY OUTPOST!
I'D BETTER TELL THE OTHERS.
*IN LAST YEAR'S CAP ANNUAL #10. --RALF
SKREEEE
THE LOCAL CONSTABLES. SHOULD WE MAKE TRACKS?
FROM THE KEYSTONE KOPS? YOU'VE GOTTA BE KIDDING ME.
WE ARE TRYING TO AVOID TROUBLE, AREN'T WE?

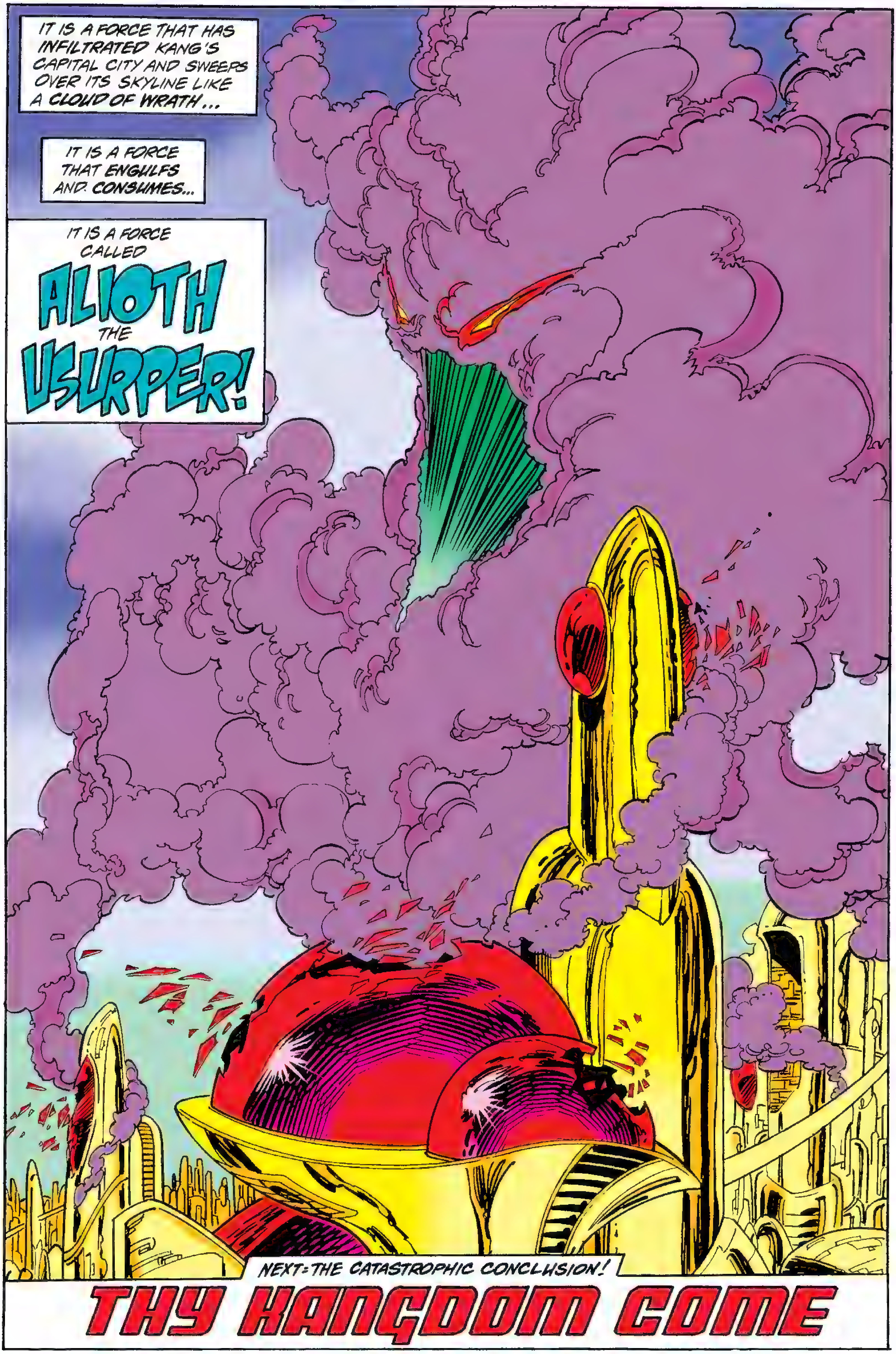

LOOK, MAYOR, YOU CAN DROP THE PRETENSE. I KNOW WHO YOU REALLY ARE.
I BEG YOUR PARDON?
YOU'RE KANG THE CONQUEROR.
KANG--? ISN'T THAT A CHINESE DYNASTY?
ALL RIGHT, YOU PEOPLE! THIS IS AN UNLAWFUL ASSEMBLY!
YOU TWO WITH THE CLUBS-- DROP THEM! EVERYONE-- HANDS IN THE AIR!
ARE YOU AWARE THAT RAVONNA RULES CHRONOPOLIS IN THE ERA WE'VE JUST RETREATED FROM? AND THAT SHE'S BEEN TARGETED BY A WOMAN NAMED REVELATION WHO--
I'M AFRAID, SIR, I AM NOT FOLLOWING A WORD YOU ARE SAYING!
MISTER MAYOR, I'D BE STEPPING AWAY, IF I WERE YOU!
THE MAYOR'S A KANG COUNTERPART, THOUGH HE DENIES IT. WE MAY BE ABLE TO USE HIM TO GET OUT OF HERE.
YOU BOYS ARE DEFYING THE LAW. NOW HANDS UP--
--OR WE'LL BE FORCED TO GET ROUGH WITH YOU!
IF THAT MAYOR'S KANG IN DISGUISE, HOW ABOUT THESE COPS?
ENERGY SCAN
___ MICROWAVE
___ X-RAY
_X_ MAGNETIC
___ ULTRAVIOLET
___ INFRARED
UH-OH!
THE COPS-- THEY'RE TIME TROOPERS!


TRYING TO SNEAK UP ON US, HMMM?
DON'T LET THEIR APPEARANCES FOOL YOU! THEY'RE FULLY ARMORED AND HEAVILY ARMED!
FOOSH
FTASH
THIS TUSSLE'S GETTING US NOWHERE--
--LET'S RETREAT BEFORE THEY BRING IN--
SKREEE
YOU WEREN'T ABOUT TO SAY "REINFORCEMENTS", WERE YOU?


WOOO
HARD TO GO ALL-OUT AGAINST GUYS WHO LOOK SO COMICAL, BUT IF I KNOW WHAT'S GOOD FOR ME, I'D BETTER!
MORE MODEL T'S PULLING UP AT THE END OF THE ROAD, TEAM!
IF THESE POLICE AREN'T WHAT THEY SEEM TO BE, MAYBE THEIR CARS AREN'T, EITHER! FOLLOW ME!


IF YOU'RE WRONG, YOU'RE GOING TO MAKE US LOOK MIGHTY FOOLISH, CAP!
THAT'S RIGHT--
VOOOSH
--IF!
SCORE ANOTHER FOR THE MAN WITH THE STAR!
YOU KNOW, THOR, WE KEEP THIS UP AND WE'LL HAVE TO RENAME OUR TEAM "THE RETREATERS!"
DON'T LOOK NOW, BUT OUR JALOPY'S JUST HAD BODY-WORK.
I CAN'T TELL IF THIS THING JUMPS THROUGH TIME--OR IF IT'S JUST AN AIRCAR!
SO WHERE'S THE PORTAL TO THE NEXT TIME-ZONE?
I'M HOPING IF WE GET ENOUGH ALTITUDE, WE'LL BE ABLE TO SPOT ONE!


THERE! THE OUTSKIRTS OF CHRONOPOLIS!
IS IT ME, OR DOES THAT *CLOUD FORMATION* ROLLING IN LOOK A LITTLE *OMINOUS*?
HEY, GANG, IF WE WERE LOOKING FOR THE *1990s*, WE'VE GONE *WAY TOO FAR!*
BEYOND THE CLOUDS-- THE DARKNESS *MOVES* AS IF 'TWERE *ALIVE!*
THEN SUDDENLY, WITHOUT WARNING--
--THE AIRCRAFT *DISINTEGRATES*--
--AS THE AVENGERS HIT A WAVE OF *INDESCRIBABLE FORCE*...


IT IS A FORCE THAT HAS INFILTRATED KANG'S CAPITAL CITY AND SWEEPS OVER ITS SKYLINE LIKE A CLOUD OF WRATH...
IT IS A FORCE THAT ENGULFS AND CONSUMES...
IT IS A FORCE CALLED ALIOTH THE USURPER!
NEXT: THE CATASTROPHIC CONCLUSION!
THY KANGDOM COME

MARVEL COMICS
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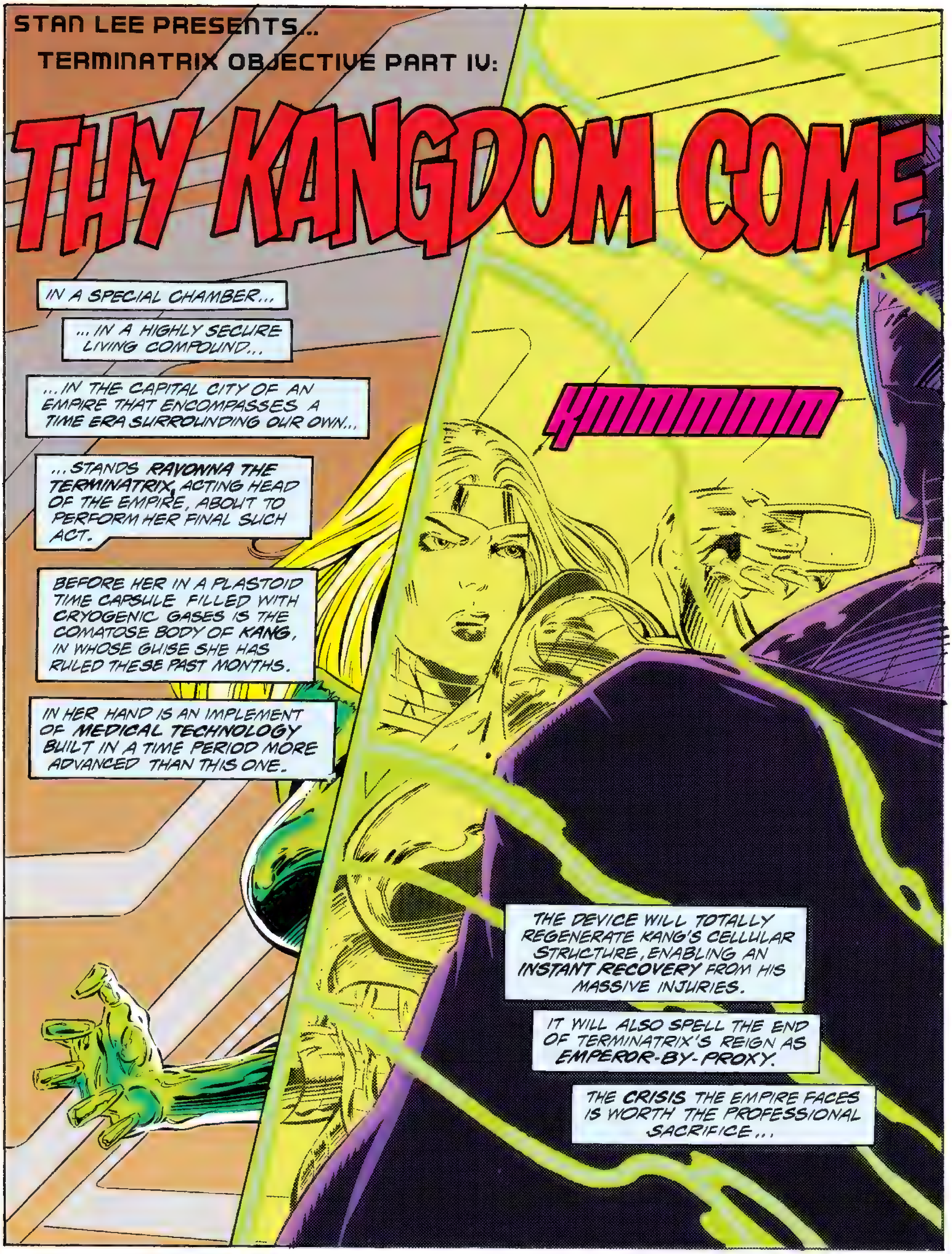
STAN LEE PRESENTS...
TERMINATRIX OBJECTIVE PART IV:
THY KANGDOM COME
IN A SPECIAL CHAMBER...
...IN A HIGHLY SECURE LIVING COMPOUND...
...IN THE CAPITAL CITY OF AN EMPIRE THAT ENCOMPASSES A TIME ERA SURROUNDING OUR OWN...
...STANDS RAVONNA THE TERMINATRIX, ACTING HEAD OF THE EMPIRE, ABOUT TO PERFORM HER FINAL SUCH ACT.
BEFORE HER IN A PLASTOID TIME CAPSULE FILLED WITH CRYOGENIC GASES IS THE COMATOSE BODY OF KANG, IN WHOSE GUISE SHE HAS RULED THESE PAST MONTHS.
IN HER HAND IS AN IMPLEMENT OF MEDICAL TECHNOLOGY BUILT IN A TIME PERIOD MORE ADVANCED THAN THIS ONE.
KMMMMMM
THE DEVICE WILL TOTALLY REGENERATE KANG'S CELLULAR STRUCTURE, ENABLING AN INSTANT RECOVERY FROM HIS MASSIVE INJURIES.
IT WILL ALSO SPELL THE END OF TERMINATRIX'S REIGN AS EMPEROR-BY-PROXY.
THE CRISIS THE EMPIRE FACES IS WORTH THE PROFESSIONAL SACRIFICE...

THE CHRONOSYNCLASTIC CONCLUSION OF AN UNTIMELY TALE TOLD BY THESE *FUTURE SHOCKERS...*

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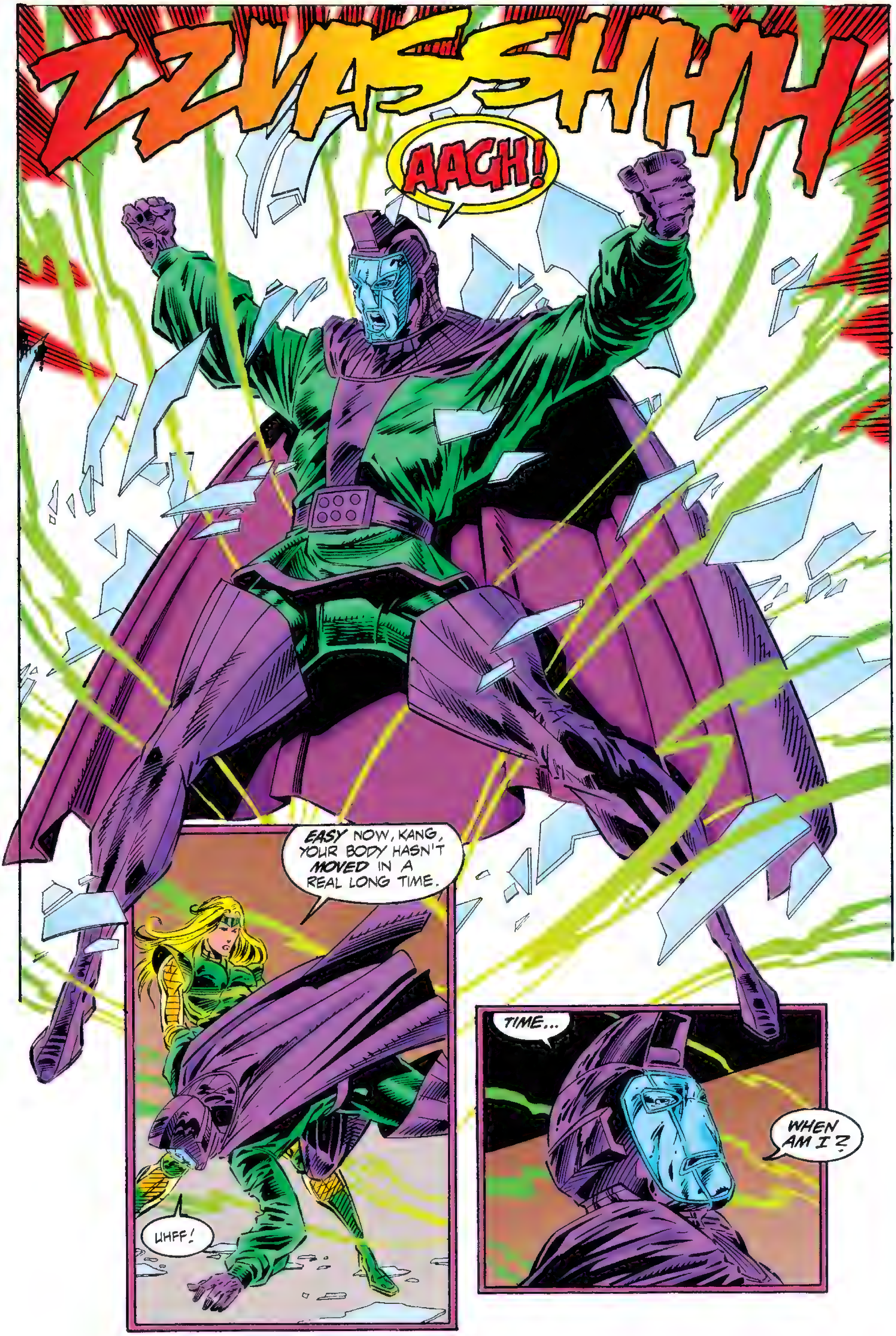
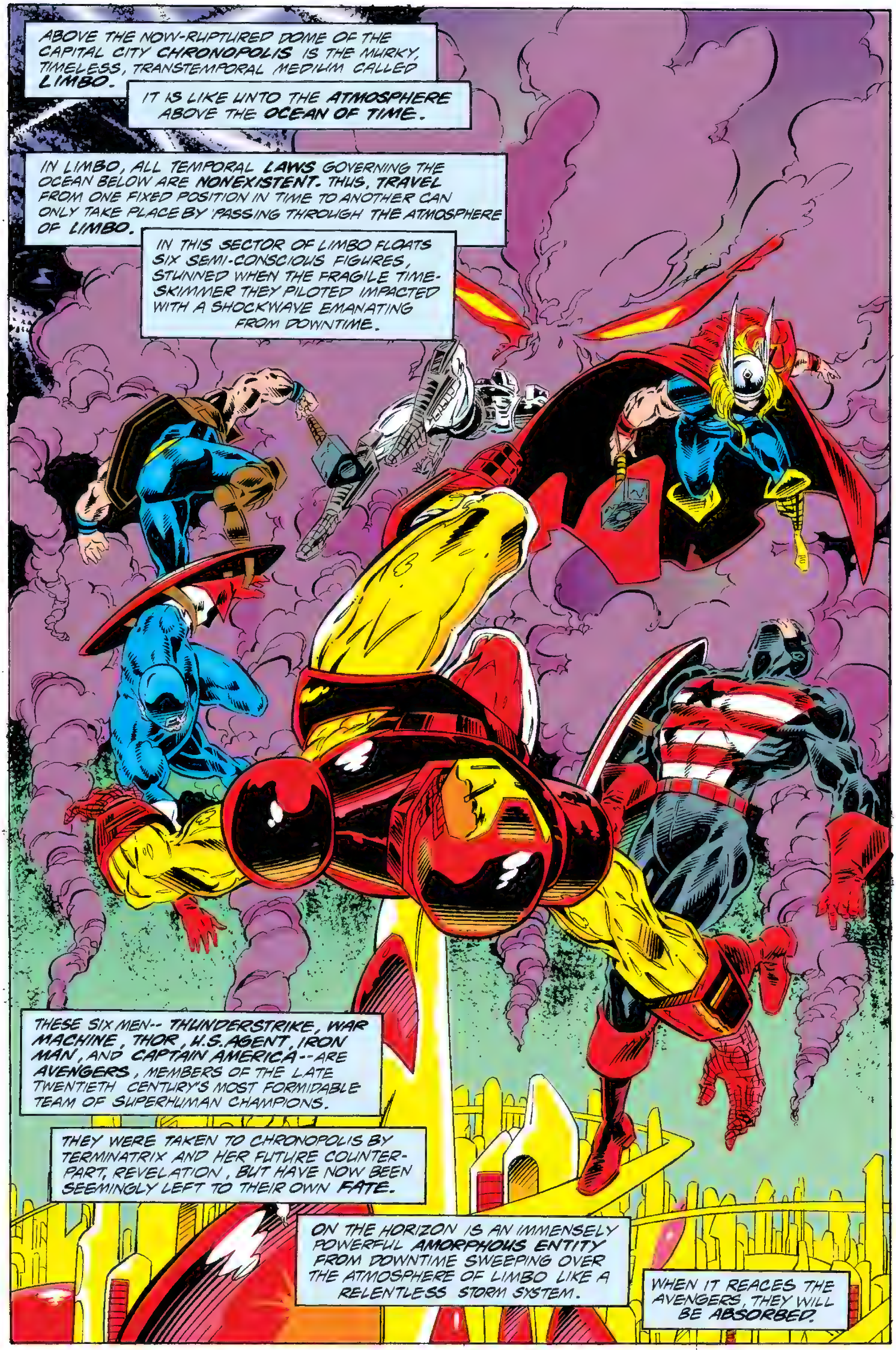
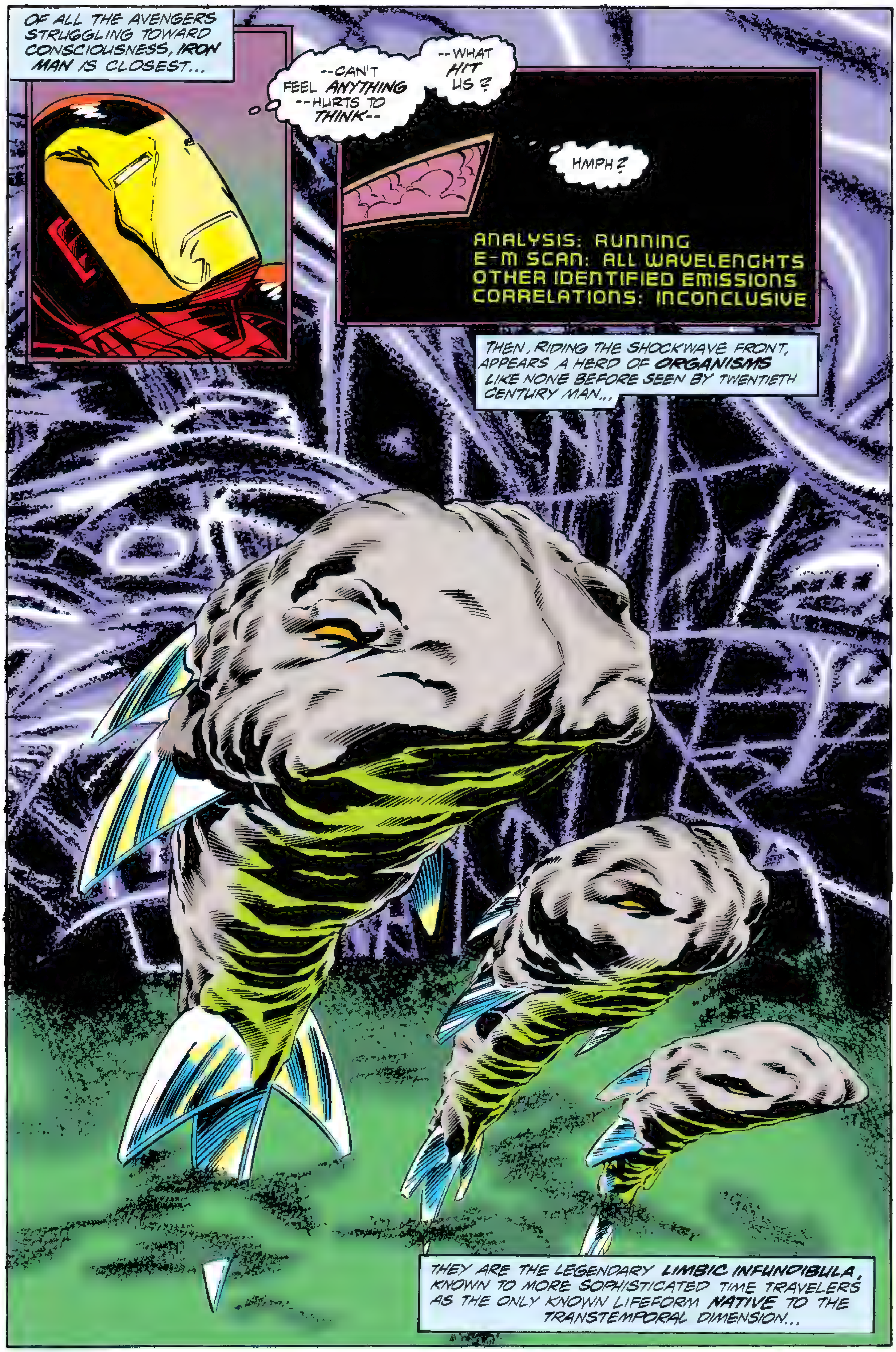
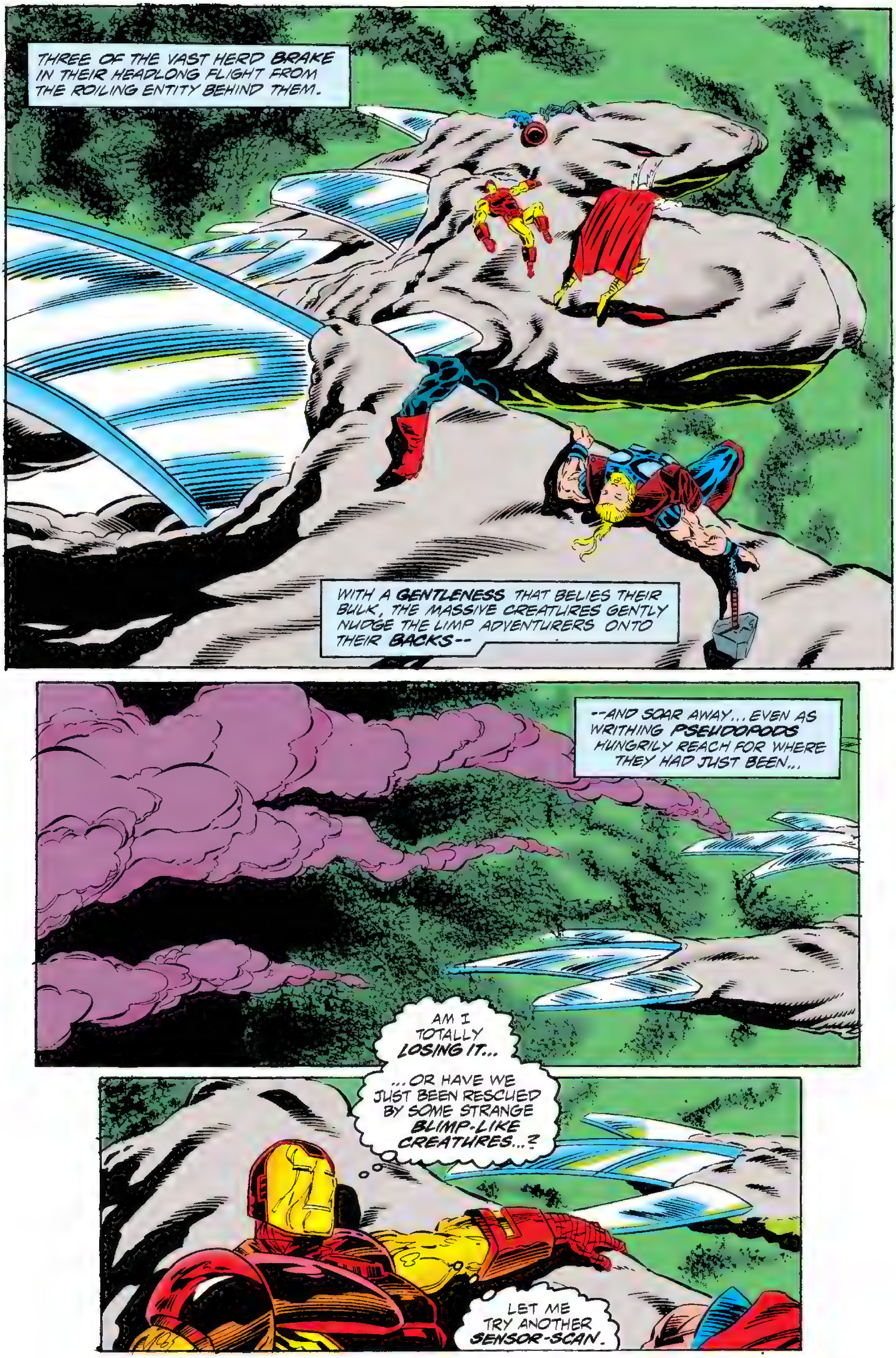
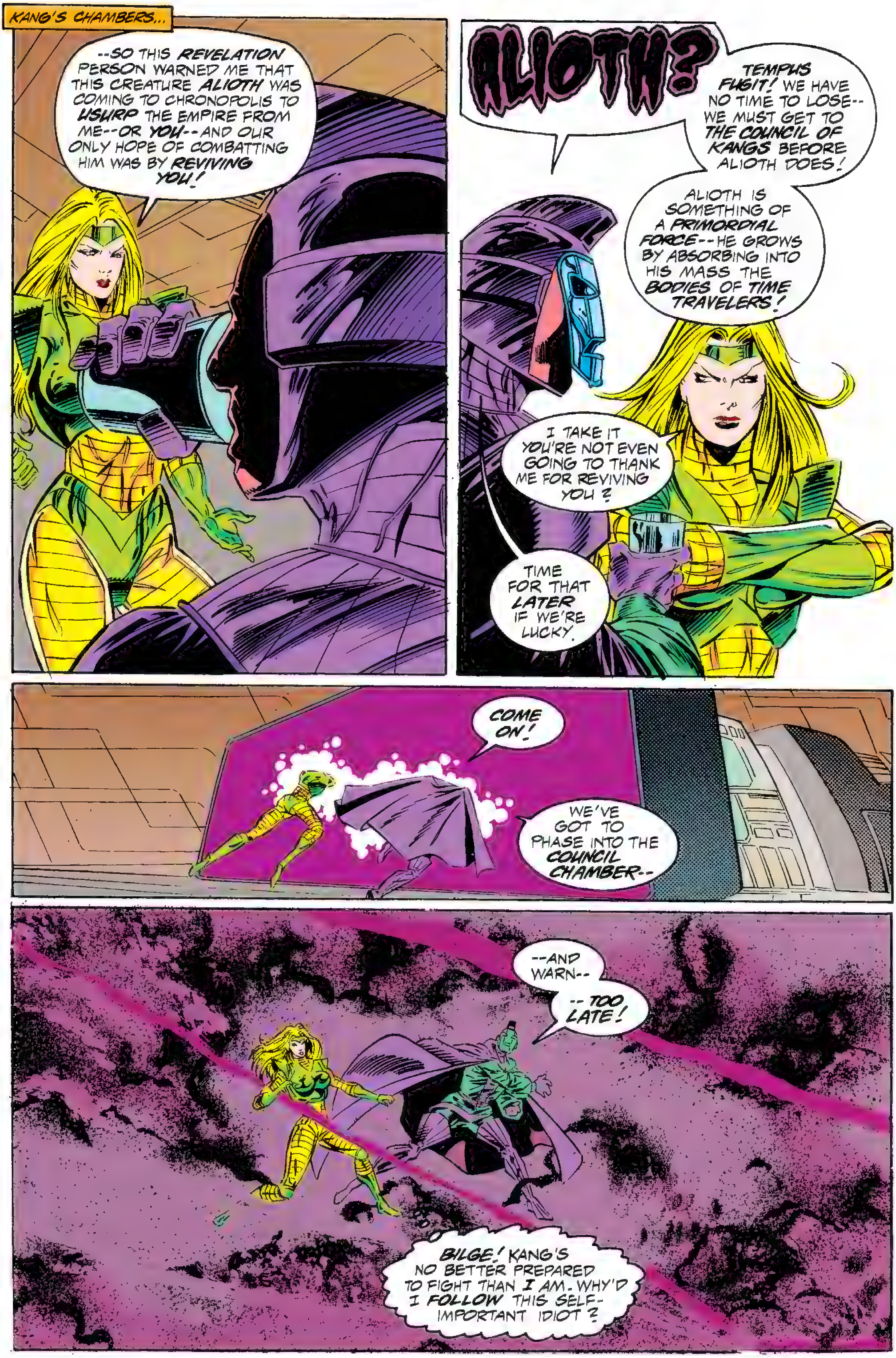
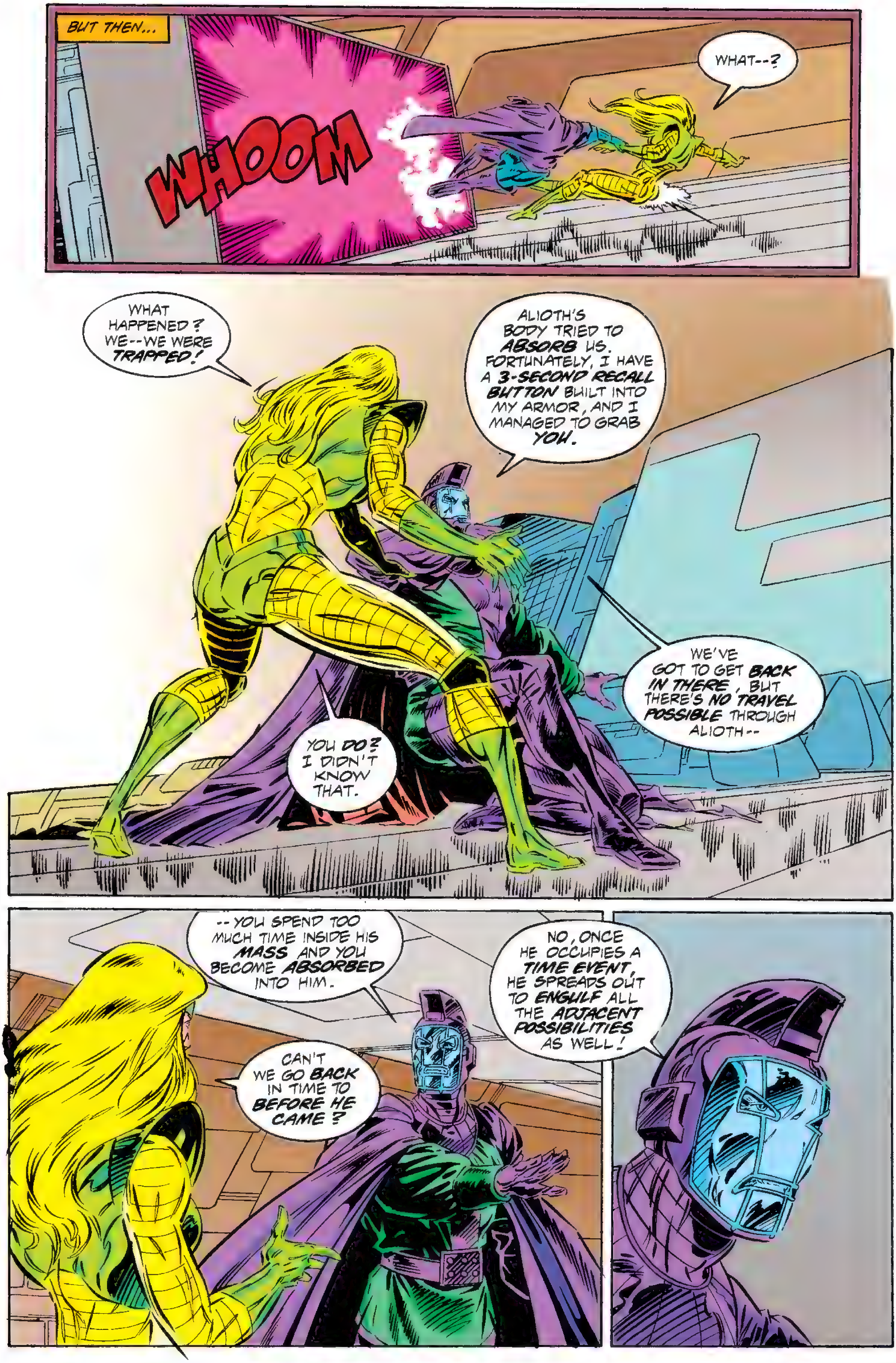

ZZWASHHHH
AAGH!
EASY NOW, KANG, YOUR BODY HASN'T MOVED IN A REAL LONG TIME.
UHFF!
TIME...
WHEN AM I?

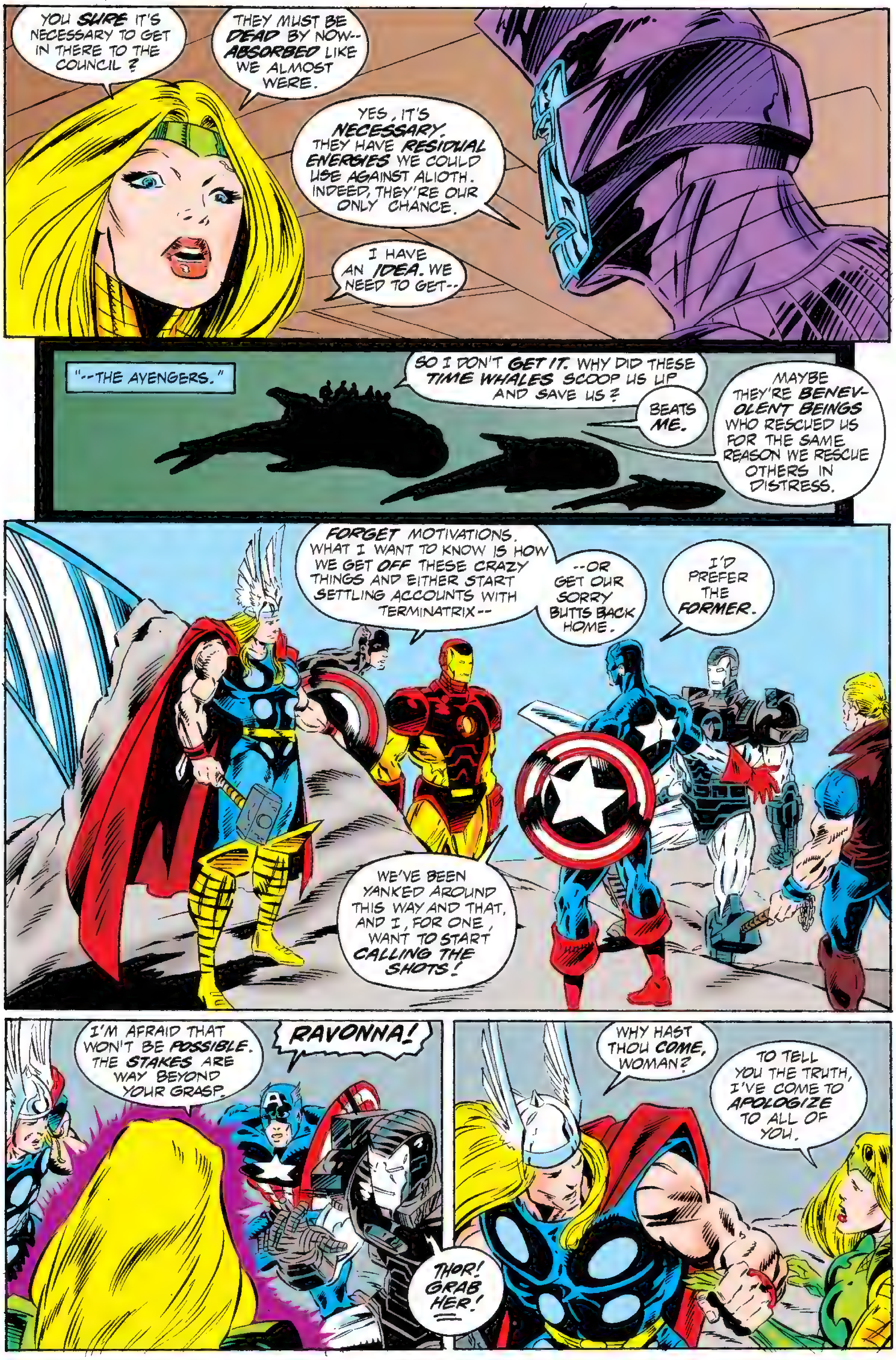

ABOVE THE NOW-RUPTURED DOME OF THE CAPITAL CITY **CHRONOPOLIS** IS THE MURKY, TIMELESS, TRANSTEMPORAL MEDIUM CALLED **LIMBO.**
IT IS LIKE UNTO THE **ATMOSPHERE** ABOVE THE **OCEAN OF TIME.**
IN LIMBO, ALL TEMPORAL **LAWS** GOVERNING THE OCEAN BELOW ARE **NONEXISTENT.** THUS, **TRAVEL** FROM ONE FIXED POSITION IN TIME TO ANOTHER CAN ONLY TAKE PLACE BY PASSING THROUGH THE ATMOSPHERE OF **LIMBO.**
IN THIS SECTOR OF LIMBO FLOATS SIX SEMI-CONSCIOUS FIGURES, STUNNED WHEN THE FRAGILE TIME-SKIMMER THEY PILOTED IMPACTED WITH A SHOCKWAVE EMANATING FROM DOWNTIME.
THESE SIX MEN-- **THUNDERSTRIKE, WAR MACHINE, THOR, U.S. AGENT, IRON MAN,** AND **CAPTAIN AMERICA**--ARE **AVENGERS,** MEMBERS OF THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY'S MOST FORMIDABLE TEAM OF SUPERHUMAN CHAMPIONS.
THEY WERE TAKEN TO CHRONOPOLIS BY TERMINATRIX AND HER FUTURE COUNTERPART, REVELATION, BUT HAVE NOW BEEN SEEMINGLY LEFT TO THEIR OWN **FATE.**
ON THE HORIZON IS AN IMMENSELY POWERFUL **AMORPHOUS ENTITY** FROM DOWNTIME SWEEPING OVER THE ATMOSPHERE OF LIMBO LIKE A RELENTLESS STORM SYSTEM.
WHEN IT REACES THE AVENGERS, THEY WILL BE **ABSORBED.**

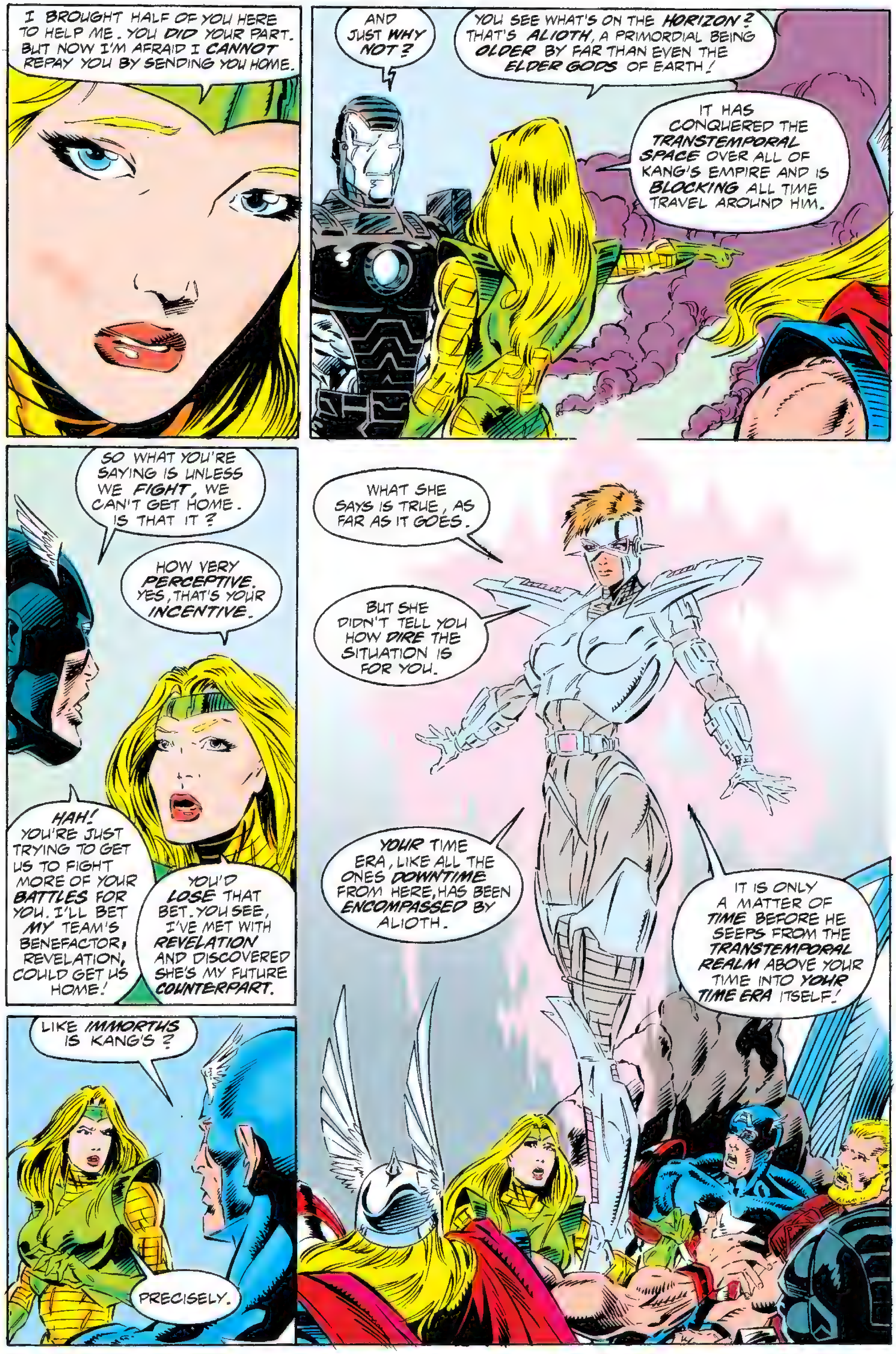

OF ALL THE AVENGERS STRUGGLING TOWARD CONSCIOUSNESS, IRON MAN IS CLOSEST...
--CAN'T FEEL ANYTHING --HURTS TO THINK--
--WHAT HIT US?
HMPH?
ANALYSIS: RUNNING
E-M SCAN: ALL WAVELENGHTS
OTHER IDENTIFIED EMISSIONS
CORRELATIONS: INCONCLUSIVE
THEN, RIDING THE SHOCKWAVE FRONT, APPEARS A HERD OF ORGANISMS LIKE NONE BEFORE SEEN BY TWENTIETH CENTURY MAN...
THEY ARE THE LEGENDARY LIMBIC INFUNDIBULA, KNOWN TO MORE SOPHISTICATED TIME TRAVELERS AS THE ONLY KNOWN LIFEFORM NATIVE TO THE TRANSTEMPORAL DIMENSION...

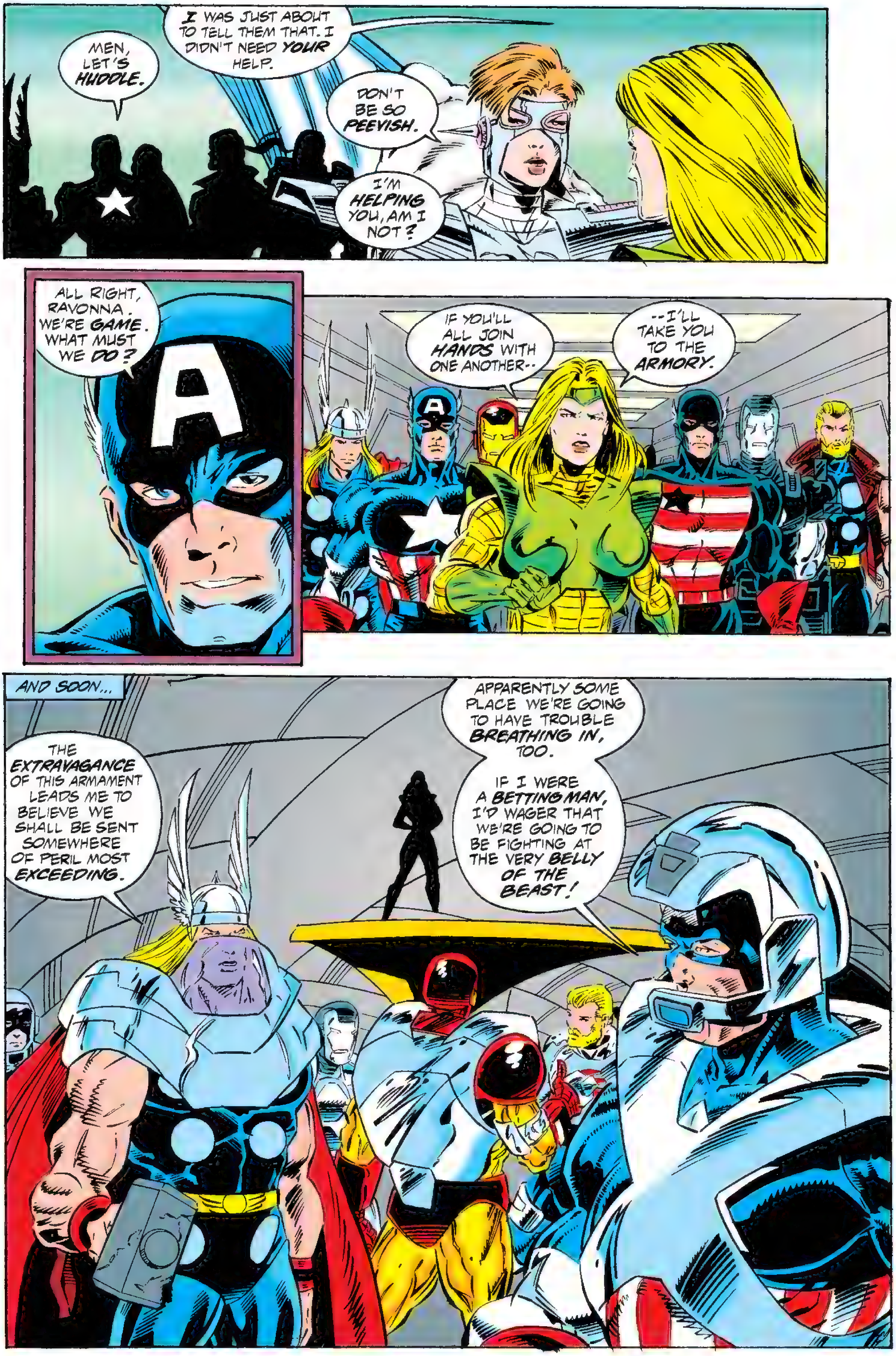

THREE OF THE VAST HERD BRAKE IN THEIR HEADLONG FLIGHT FROM THE ROILING ENTITY BEHIND THEM.
WITH A GENTLENESS THAT BELIES THEIR BULK, THE MASSIVE CREATURES GENTLY NUDGE THE LIMP ADVENTURERS ONTO THEIR BACKS--
--AND SOAR AWAY... EVEN AS WRITHING PSEUDOPODS HUNGRILY REACH FOR WHERE THEY HAD JUST BEEN...
AM I TOTALLY LOSING IT...
...OR HAVE WE JUST BEEN RESCUED BY SOME STRANGE BLIMP-LIKE CREATURES...?
LET ME TRY ANOTHER SENSOR-SCAN.

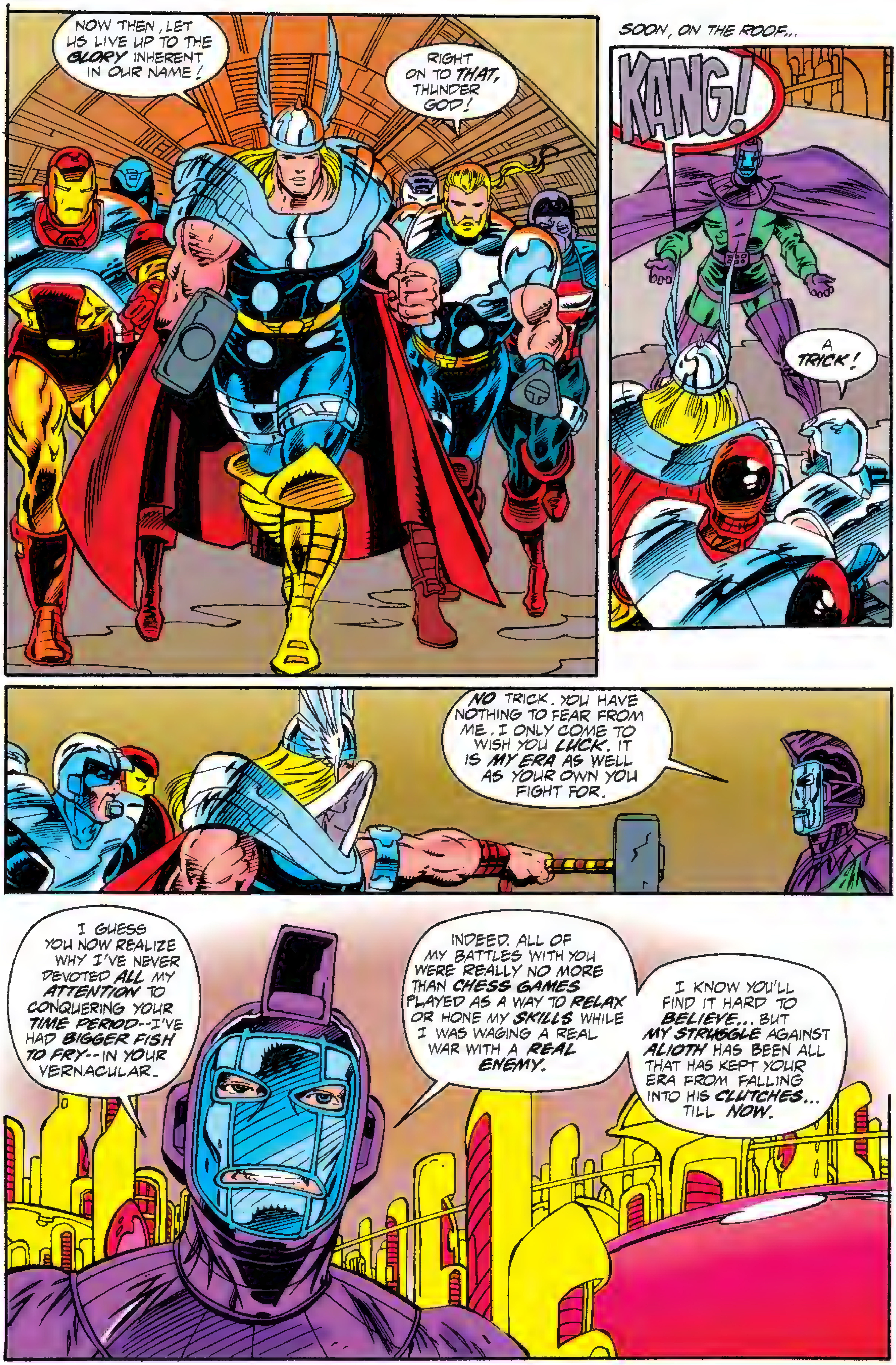

KANG'S CHAMBERS...
--SO THIS REVELATION PERSON WARNED ME THAT THIS CREATURE ALIOTH WAS COMING TO CHRONOPOLIS TO USURP THE EMPIRE FROM ME--OR YOU--AND OUR ONLY HOPE OF COMBATTING HIM WAS BY REVIVING YOU!
ALIOTH?
TEMPUS FUGIT! WE HAVE NO TIME TO LOSE-- WE MUST GET TO THE COUNCIL OF KANGS BEFORE ALIOTH DOES!
ALIOTH IS SOMETHING OF A PRIMORDIAL FORCE--HE GROWS BY ABSORBING INTO HIS MASS THE BODIES OF TIME TRAVELERS!
I TAKE IT YOU'RE NOT EVEN GOING TO THANK ME FOR REVIVING YOU?
TIME FOR THAT LATER IF WE'RE LUCKY.
COME ON!
WE'VE GOT TO PHASE INTO THE COUNCIL CHAMBER--
--AND WARN--
--TOO LATE!
BILGE! KANG'S NO BETTER PREPARED TO FIGHT THAN I AM. WHY'D I FOLLOW THIS SELF-IMPORTANT IDIOT?

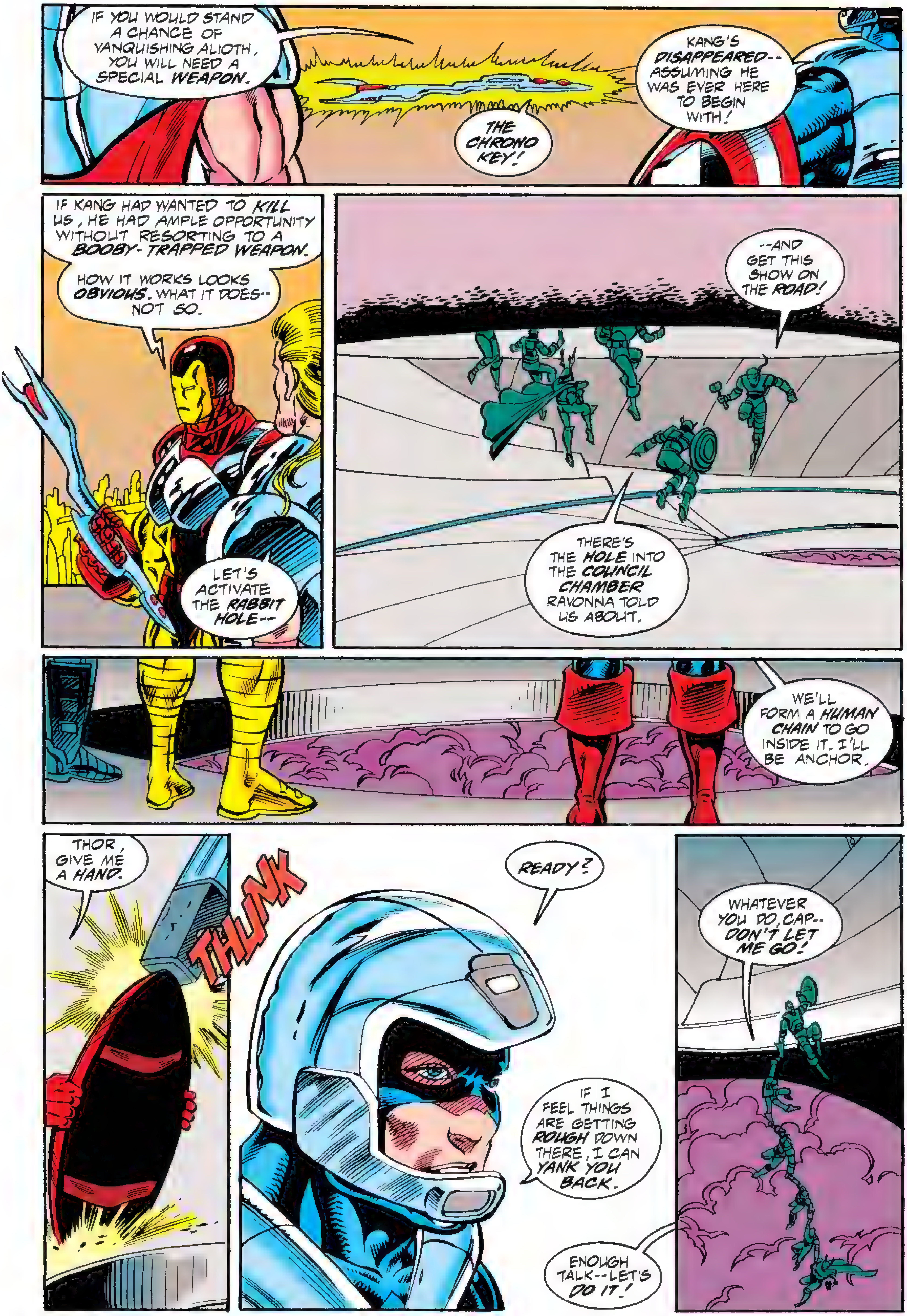

BUT THEN...
WHOOM
WHAT--?
WHAT HAPPENED? WE--WE WERE TRAPPED!
ALIOTH'S BODY TRIED TO ABSORB US. FORTUNATELY, I HAVE A 3-SECOND RECALL BUTTON BUILT INTO MY ARMOR, AND I MANAGED TO GRAB YOU.
WE'VE GOT TO GET BACK IN THERE, BUT THERE'S NO TRAVEL POSSIBLE THROUGH ALIOTH--
YOU DO? I DIDN'T KNOW THAT.
--YOU SPEND TOO MUCH TIME INSIDE HIS MASS AND YOU BECOME ABSORBED INTO HIM.
CAN'T WE GO BACK IN TIME TO BEFORE HE CAME?
NO, ONCE HE OCCUPIES A TIME EVENT, HE SPREADS OUT TO ENGULF ALL THE ADJACENT POSSIBILITIES AS WELL!

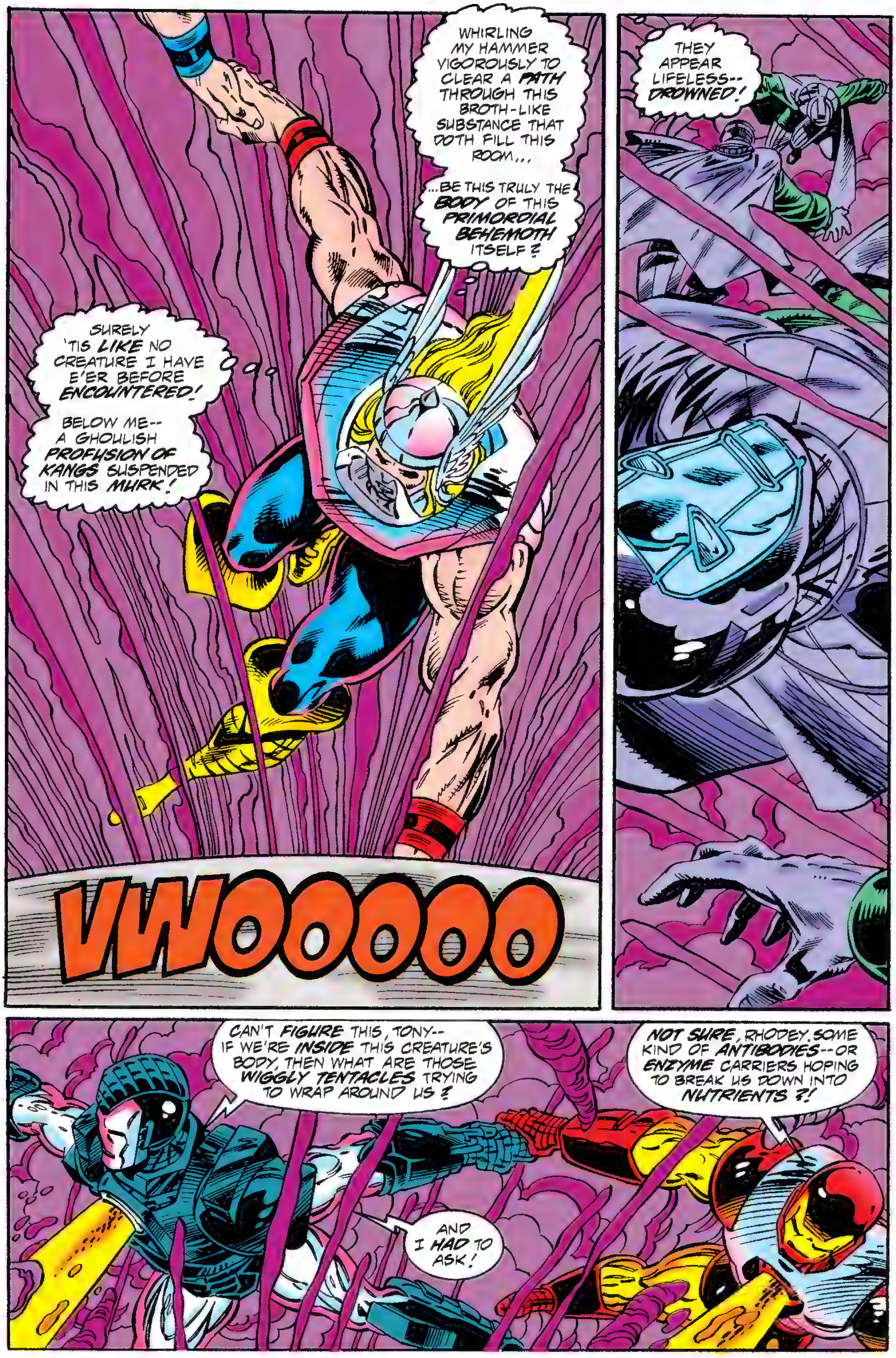

YOU SURE IT'S NECESSARY TO GET IN THERE TO THE COUNCIL?
THEY MUST BE DEAD BY NOW-- ABSORBED LIKE WE ALMOST WERE.
YES, IT'S NECESSARY. THEY HAVE RESIDUAL ENERGIES WE COULD USE AGAINST ALIOTH. INDEED, THEY'RE OUR ONLY CHANCE.
I HAVE AN IDEA. WE NEED TO GET--
"--THE AVENGERS."
SO I DON'T GET IT. WHY DID THESE TIME WHALES SCOOP US UP AND SAVE US?
BEATS ME.
MAYBE THEY'RE BENEVOLENT BEINGS WHO RESCUED US FOR THE SAME REASON WE RESCUE OTHERS IN DISTRESS.
FORGET MOTIVATIONS. WHAT I WANT TO KNOW IS HOW WE GET OFF THESE CRAZY THINGS AND EITHER START SETTLING ACCOUNTS WITH TERMINATRIX--
--OR GET OUR SORRY BUTTS BACK HOME.
I'D PREFER THE FORMER.
WE'VE BEEN YANKED AROUND THIS WAY AND THAT, AND I, FOR ONE, WANT TO START CALLING THE SHOTS!
I'M AFRAID THAT WON'T BE POSSIBLE. THE STAKES ARE WAY BEYOND YOUR GRASP.
RAVONNA!
THOR! GRAB HER!
WHY HAST THOU COME, WOMAN?
TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH, I'VE COME TO APOLOGIZE TO ALL OF YOU.

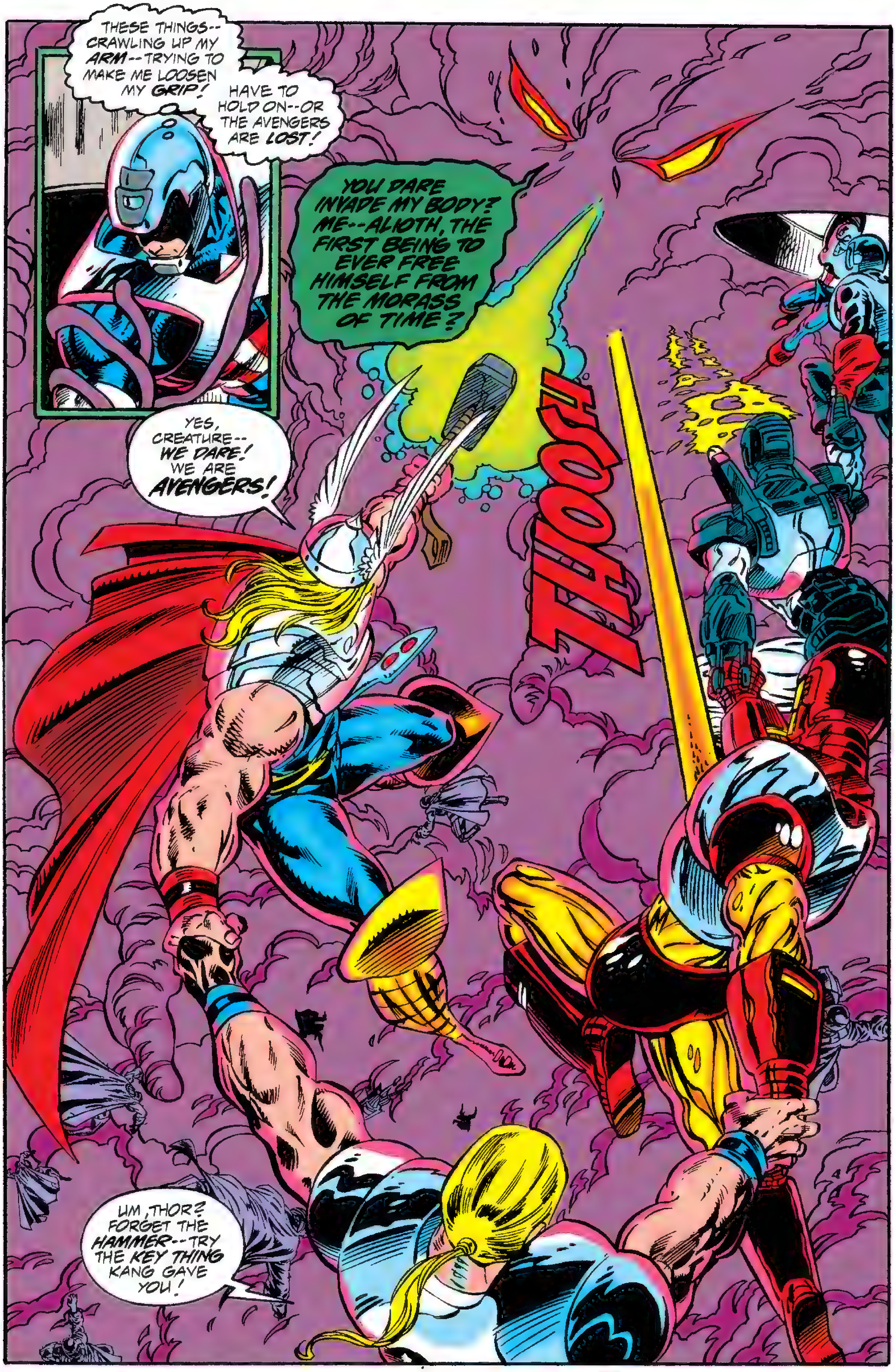

I BROUGHT HALF OF YOU HERE TO HELP ME. YOU *DID* YOUR PART. BUT NOW I'M AFRAID I *CANNOT* REPAY YOU BY SENDING YOU HOME.
AND JUST *WHY NOT?*
YOU SEE WHAT'S ON THE *HORIZON?* THAT'S *ALIOTH*, A PRIMORDIAL BEING *OLDER* BY FAR THAN EVEN THE *ELDER GODS* OF EARTH!
IT HAS CONQUERED THE *TRANSTEMPORAL SPACE* OVER ALL OF KANG'S EMPIRE AND IS *BLOCKING* ALL TIME TRAVEL AROUND HIM.
SO WHAT YOU'RE SAYING IS UNLESS WE *FIGHT*, WE CAN'T GET HOME. IS THAT IT?
HOW VERY *PERCEPTIVE*. YES, THAT'S YOUR *INCENTIVE*.
HAH! YOU'RE JUST TRYING TO GET US TO FIGHT MORE OF YOUR *BATTLES* FOR YOU. I'LL BET *MY* TEAM'S BENEFACTOR, REVELATION, COULD GET US HOME!
YOU'D *LOSE* THAT BET. YOU SEE, I'VE MET WITH *REVELATION* AND DISCOVERED SHE'S MY FUTURE *COUNTERPART*.
LIKE *IMMORTUS* IS KANG'S?
PRECISELY.
WHAT SHE SAYS IS TRUE, AS FAR AS IT GOES.
BUT SHE DIDN'T TELL YOU HOW *DIRE* THE SITUATION IS FOR YOU.
YOUR TIME ERA, LIKE ALL THE ONES *DOWNTIME* FROM HERE, HAS BEEN *ENCOMPASSED* BY ALIOTH.
IT IS ONLY A MATTER OF *TIME* BEFORE HE SEEPS FROM THE *TRANSTEMPORAL REALM* ABOVE YOUR TIME INTO *YOUR TIME ERA* ITSELF!

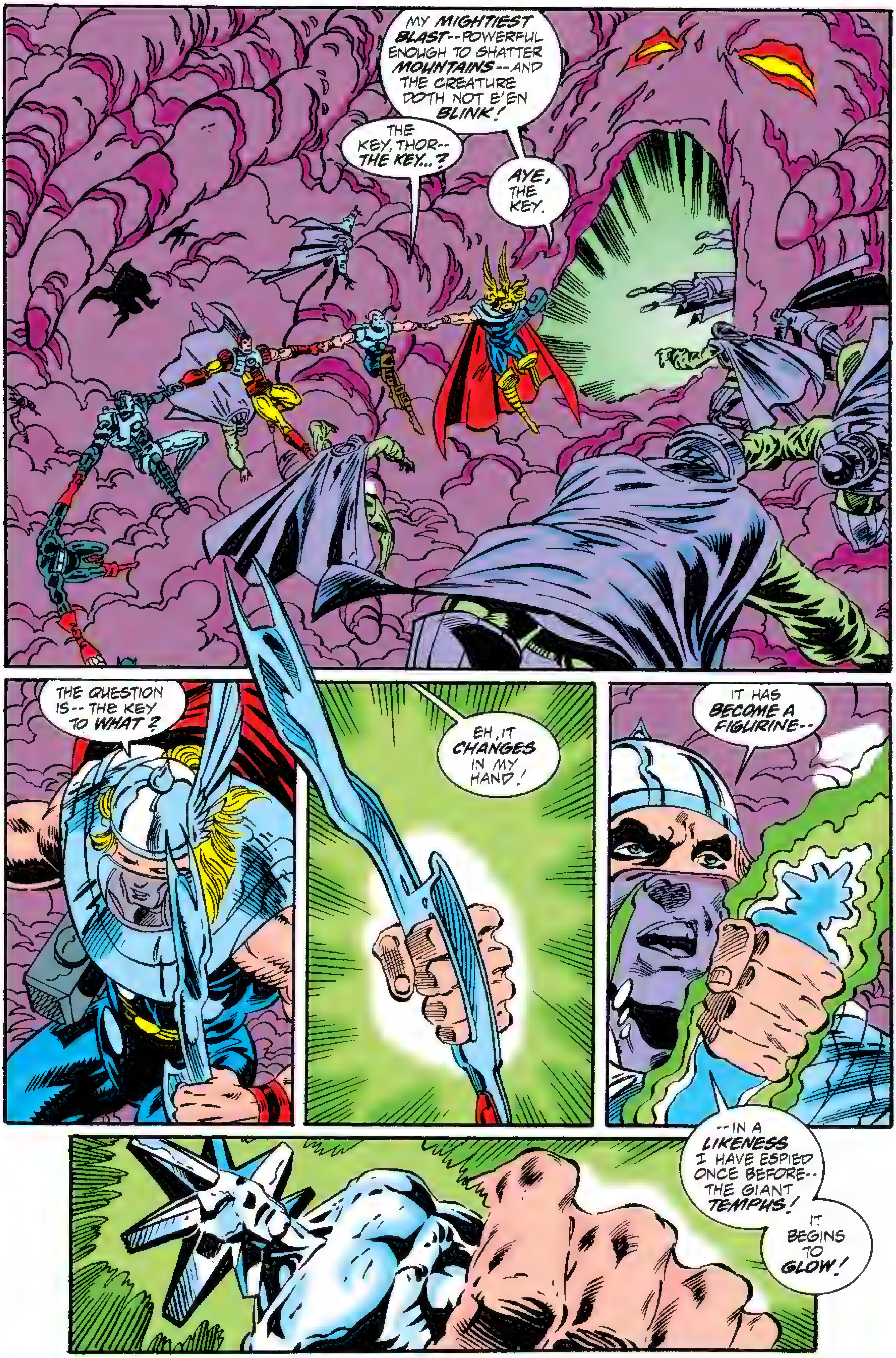

MEN, LET'S HUDDLE.
I WAS JUST ABOUT TO TELL THEM THAT. I DIDN'T NEED YOUR HELP.
DON'T BE SO PEEVISH.
I'M HELPING YOU, AM I NOT?
ALL RIGHT, RAVONNA. WE'RE GAME. WHAT MUST WE DO?
IF YOU'LL ALL JOIN HANDS WITH ONE ANOTHER--
--I'LL TAKE YOU TO THE ARMORY.
AND SOON...
THE EXTRAVAGANCE OF THIS ARMAMENT LEADS ME TO BELIEVE WE SHALL BE SENT SOMEWHERE OF PERIL MOST EXCEEDING.
APPARENTLY SOME PLACE WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TROUBLE BREATHING IN, TOO.
IF I WERE A BETTING MAN, I'D WAGER THAT WE'RE GOING TO BE FIGHTING AT THE VERY BELLY OF THE BEAST!

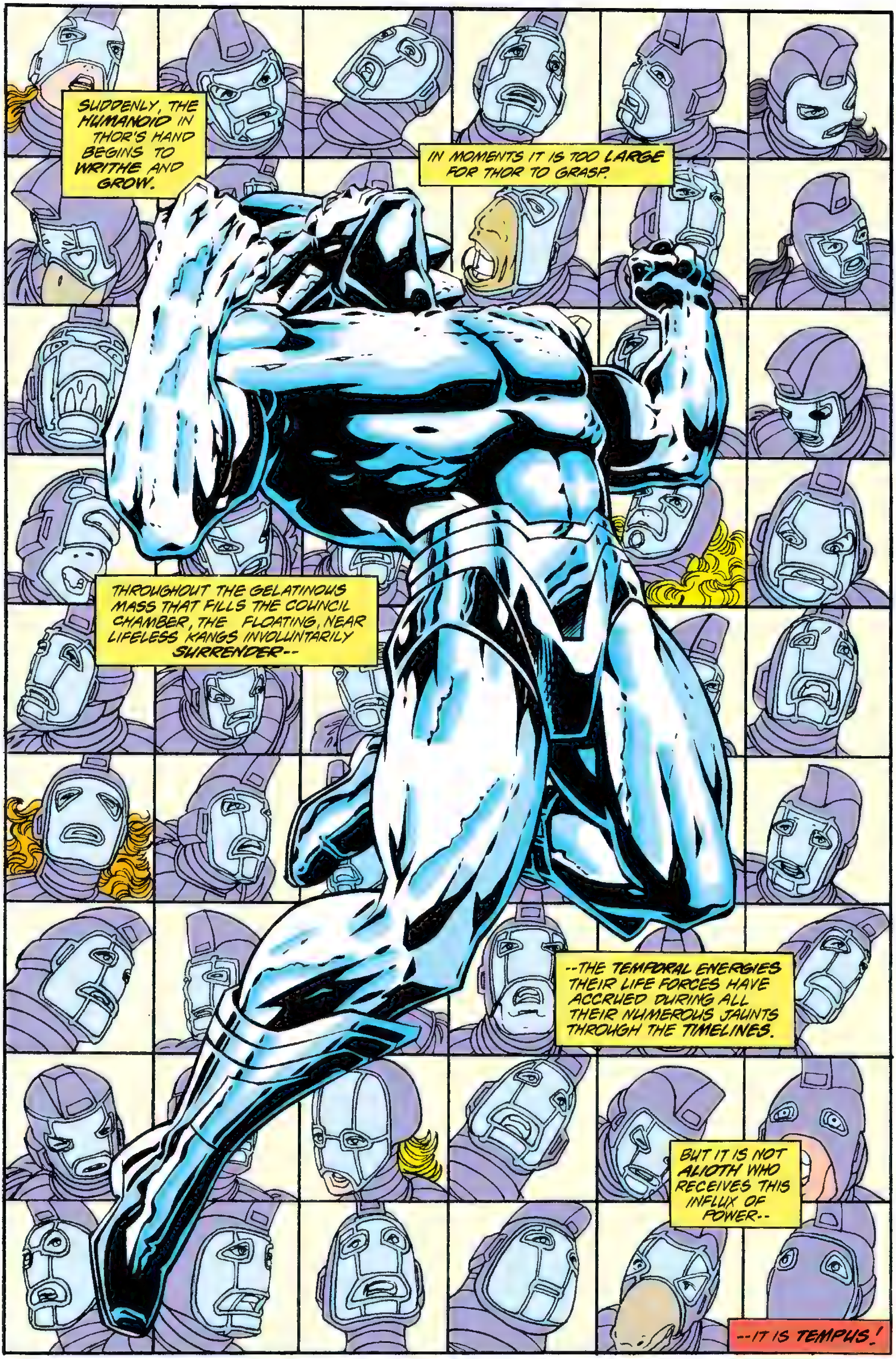

NOW THEN, LET US LIVE UP TO THE GLORY INHERENT IN OUR NAME!
RIGHT ON TO THAT, THUNDER GOD!
SOON, ON THE ROOF...
KANG!
A TRICK!
NO TRICK. YOU HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR FROM ME. I ONLY COME TO WISH YOU LUCK. IT IS MY ERA AS WELL AS YOUR OWN YOU FIGHT FOR.
I GUESS YOU NOW REALIZE WHY I'VE NEVER DEVOTED ALL MY ATTENTION TO CONQUERING YOUR TIME PERIOD--I'VE HAD BIGGER FISH TO FRY--IN YOUR VERNACULAR.
INDEED. ALL OF MY BATTLES WITH YOU WERE REALLY NO MORE THAN CHESS GAMES PLAYED AS A WAY TO RELAX OR HONE MY SKILLS WHILE I WAS WAGING A REAL WAR WITH A REAL ENEMY.
I KNOW YOU'LL FIND IT HARD TO BELIEVE... BUT MY STRUGGLE AGAINST ALIOTH HAS BEEN ALL THAT HAS KEPT YOUR ERA FROM FALLING INTO HIS CLUTCHES... TILL NOW.

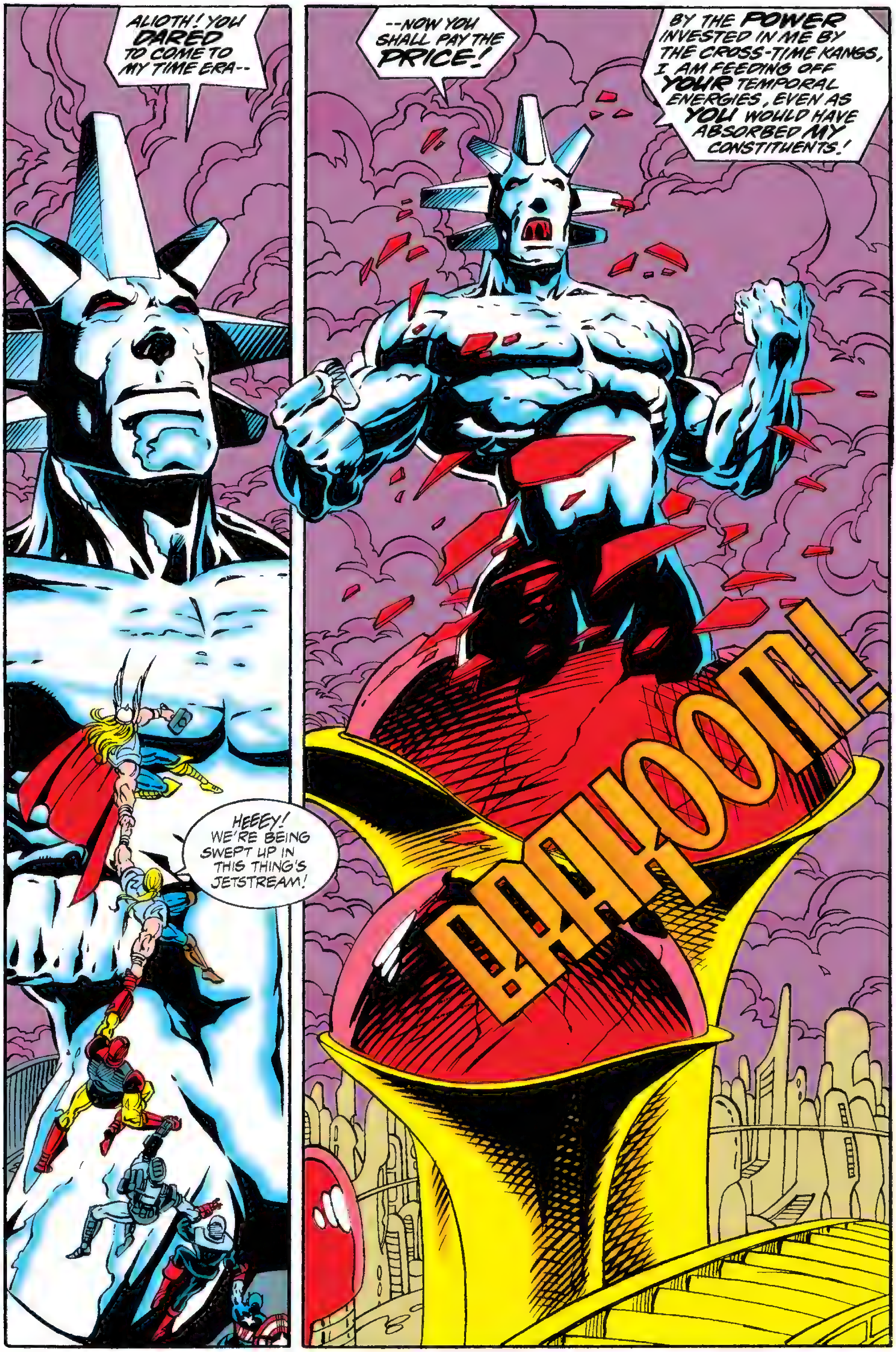

IF YOU WOULD STAND A CHANCE OF VANQUISHING ALIOTH, YOU WILL NEED A SPECIAL WEAPON.
THE CHRONO KEY!
KANG'S DISAPPEARED-- ASSUMING HE WAS EVER HERE TO BEGIN WITH!
IF KANG HAD WANTED TO KILL US, HE HAD AMPLE OPPORTUNITY WITHOUT RESORTING TO A BOOBY-TRAPPED WEAPON.
HOW IT WORKS LOOKS OBVIOUS. WHAT IT DOES-- NOT SO.
LET'S ACTIVATE THE RABBIT HOLE--
--AND GET THIS SHOW ON THE ROAD!
THERE'S THE HOLE INTO THE COUNCIL CHAMBER RAVONNA TOLD US ABOUT.
WE'LL FORM A HUMAN CHAIN TO GO INSIDE IT. I'LL BE ANCHOR.
THOR, GIVE ME A HAND.
THUNK
READY?
IF I FEEL THINGS ARE GETTING ROUGH DOWN THERE, I CAN YANK YOU BACK.
ENOUGH TALK--LET'S DO IT!
WHATEVER YOU DO, CAP-- DON'T LET ME GO!

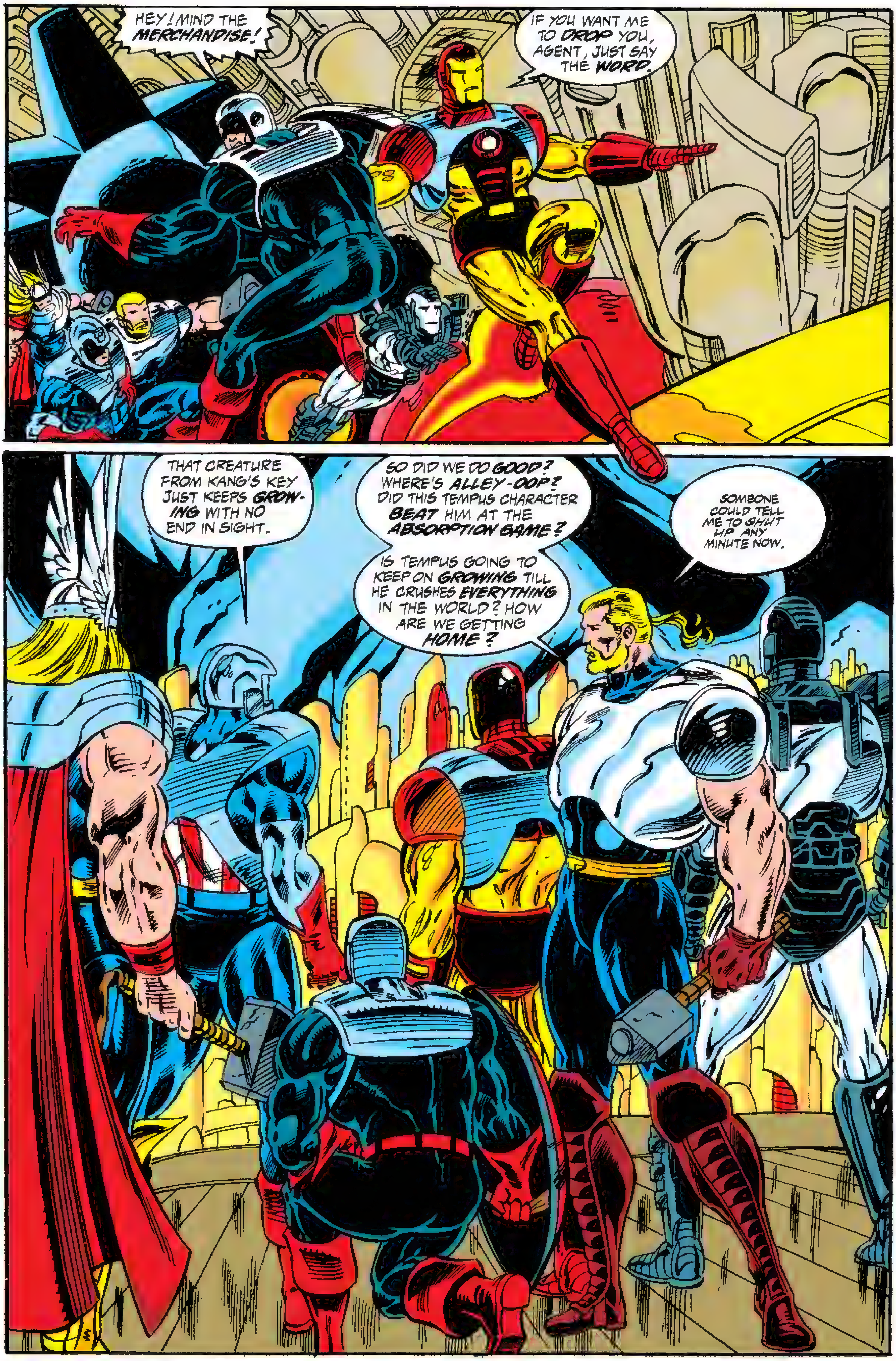

WHIRLING MY HAMMER VIGOROUSLY TO CLEAR A PATH THROUGH THIS BROTH-LIKE SUBSTANCE THAT DOTH FILL THIS ROOM...
...BE THIS TRULY THE BODY OF THIS PRIMORDIAL BEHEMOTH ITSELF?
SURELY 'TIS LIKE NO CREATURE I HAVE E'ER BEFORE ENCOUNTERED!
BELOW ME-- A GHOULISH PROFUSION OF KANGS SUSPENDED IN THIS MURK!
VWOOOOOO
THEY APPEAR LIFELESS-- DROWNED!
CAN'T FIGURE THIS, TONY-- IF WE'RE INSIDE THIS CREATURE'S BODY, THEN WHAT ARE THOSE WIGGLY TENTACLES TRYING TO WRAP AROUND US?
NOT SURE, RHODEY. SOME KIND OF ANTIBODIES--OR ENZYME CARRIERS HOPING TO BREAK US DOWN INTO NUTRIENTS?!
AND I HAD TO ASK!

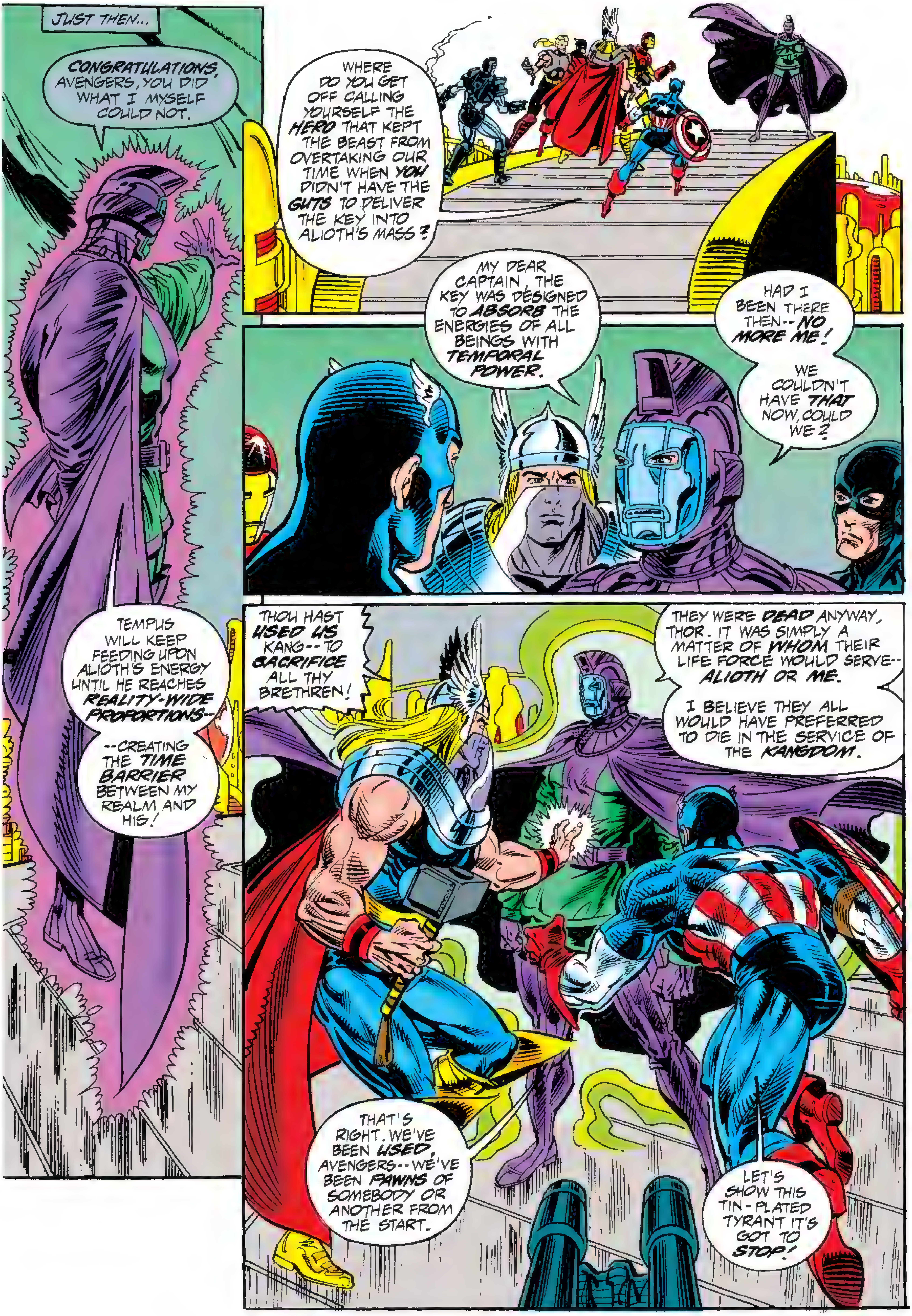

THESE THINGS--CRAWLING UP MY ARM--TRYING TO MAKE ME LOOSEN MY GRIP!
HAVE TO HOLD ON--OR THE AVENGERS ARE LOST!
YOU DARE INVADE MY BODY? ME--ALIOTH, THE FIRST BEING TO EVER FREE HIMSELF FROM THE MORASS OF TIME?
THOOM!
YES, CREATURE-- WE DARE! WE ARE AVENGERS!
UM, THOR? FORGET THE HAMMER--TRY THE KEY THING KANG GAVE YOU!

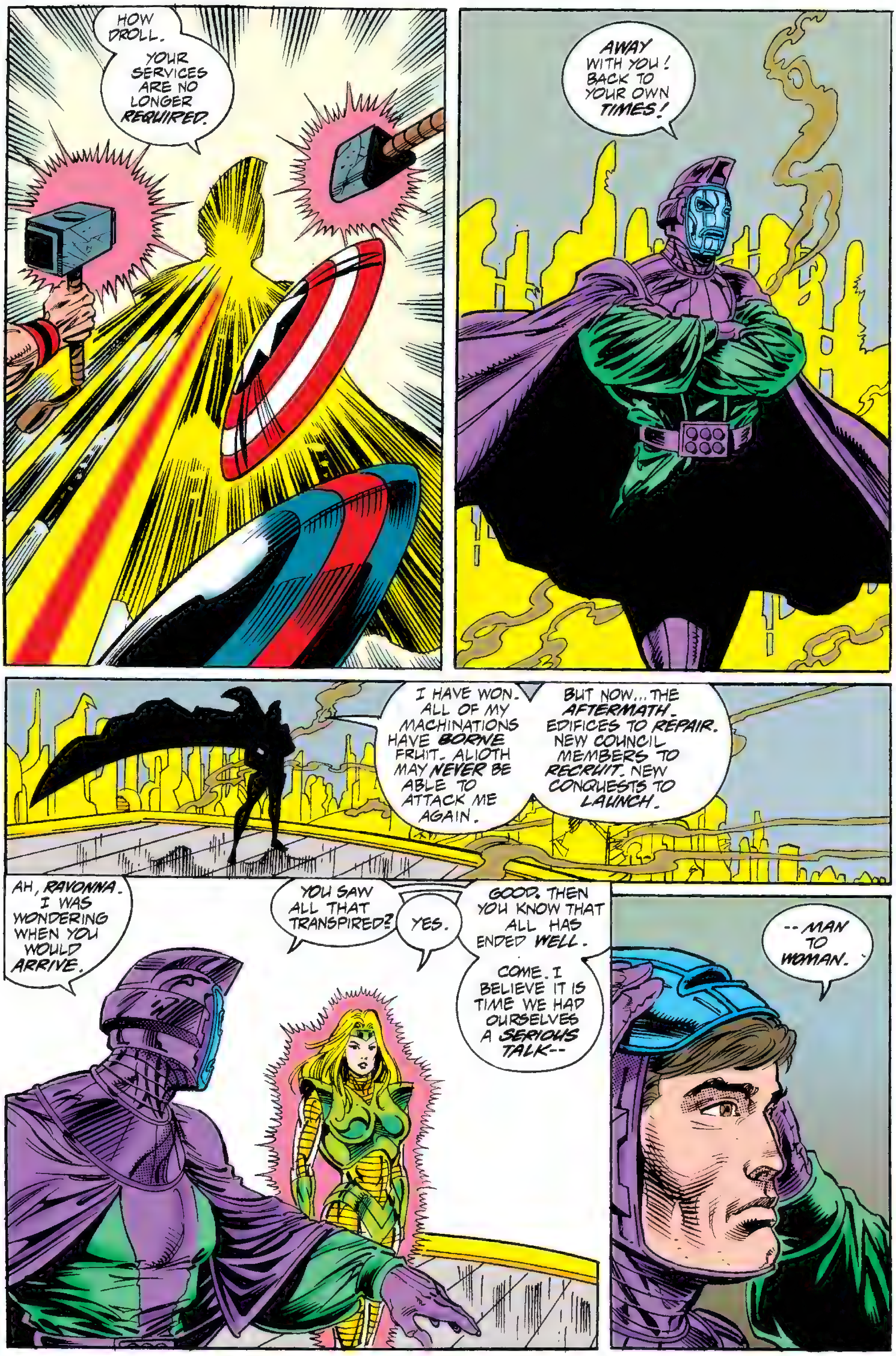

MY MIGHTIEST BLAST--POWERFUL ENOUGH TO SHATTER MOUNTAINS--AND THE CREATURE DOTH NOT E'EN BLINK!
THE KEY, THOR-- THE KEY...?
AYE, THE KEY.
THE QUESTION IS-- THE KEY TO WHAT?
EH, IT CHANGES IN MY HAND!
IT HAS BECOME A FIGURINE--
--IN A LIKENESS I HAVE ESPIED ONCE BEFORE-- THE GIANT TEMPUS!
IT BEGINS TO GLOW!

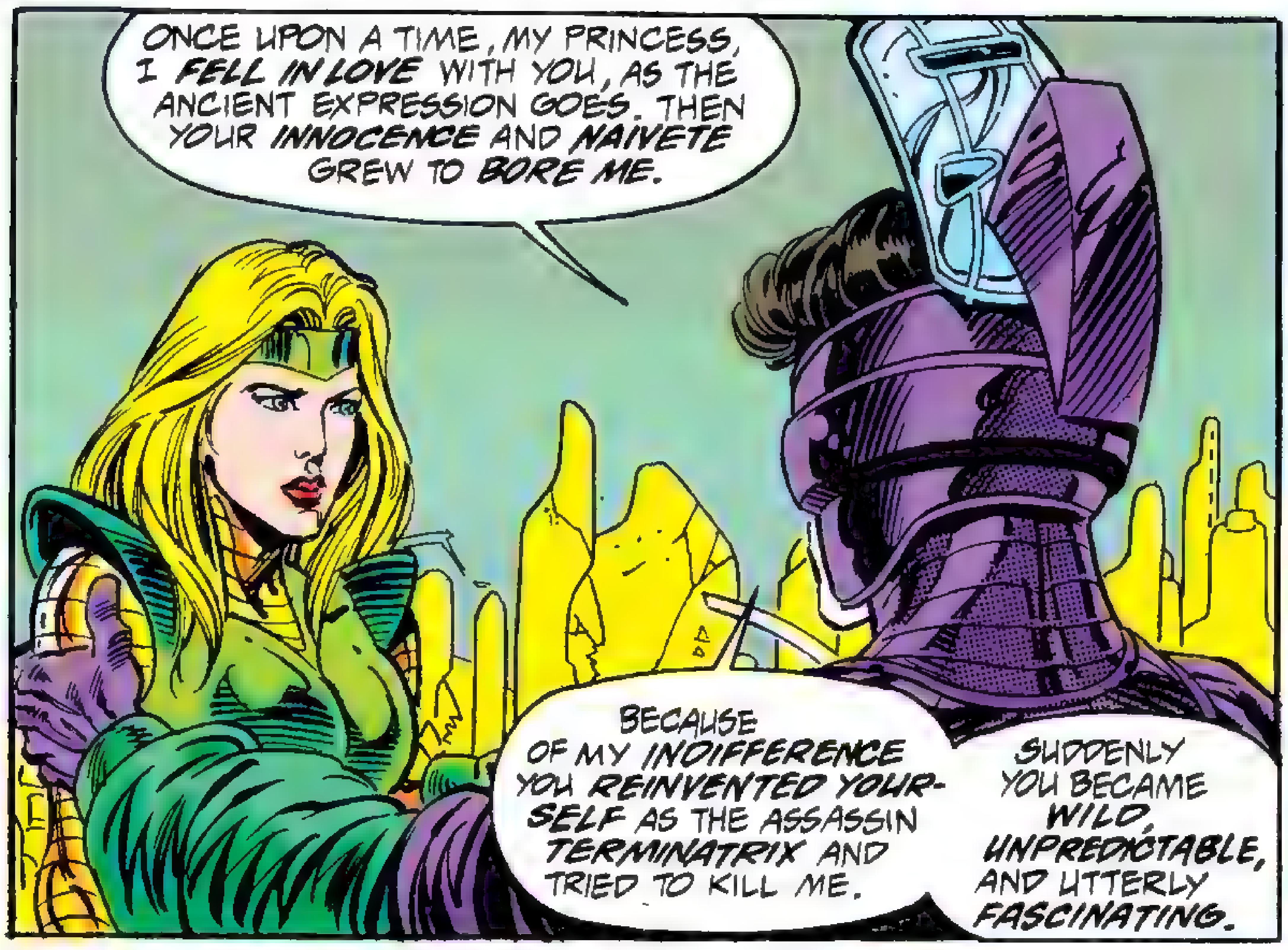

SUDDENLY, THE *HUMANOID* IN THOR'S HAND BEGINS TO *WRITHE* AND *GROW.*
IN MOMENTS IT IS TOO *LARGE* FOR THOR TO GRASP.
THROUGHOUT THE GELATINOUS MASS THAT FILLS THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, THE FLOATING, NEAR LIFELESS *KANGS* INVOLUNTARILY *SURRENDER--*
--THE *TEMPORAL ENERGIES* THEIR LIFE FORCES HAVE ACCRUED DURING ALL THEIR NUMEROUS JAUNTS THROUGH THE *TIMELINES.*
BUT IT IS NOT *ALIOTH* WHO RECEIVES THIS INFLUX OF POWER--
--IT IS *TEMPUS!*

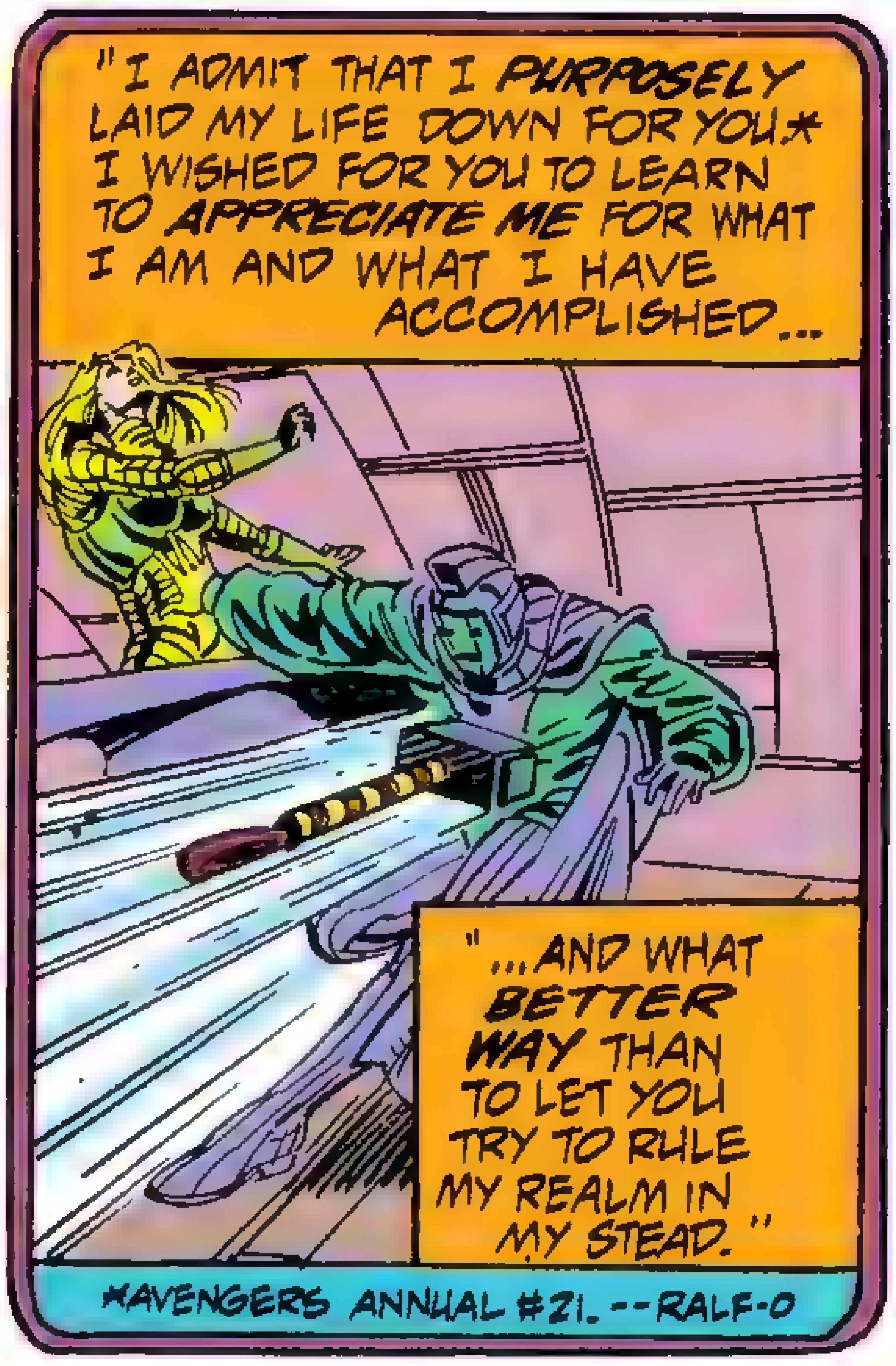

ALIOTH! YOU DARED TO COME TO MY TIME ERA--
HEEEY! WE'RE BEING SWEPT UP IN THIS THING'S JETSTREAM!
--NOW YOU SHALL PAY THE PRICE!
BY THE POWER INVESTED IN ME BY THE CROSS-TIME KANGS, I AM FEEDING OFF YOUR TEMPORAL ENERGIES, EVEN AS YOU WOULD HAVE ABSORBED MY CONSTITUENTS!
BRRHOOM!!

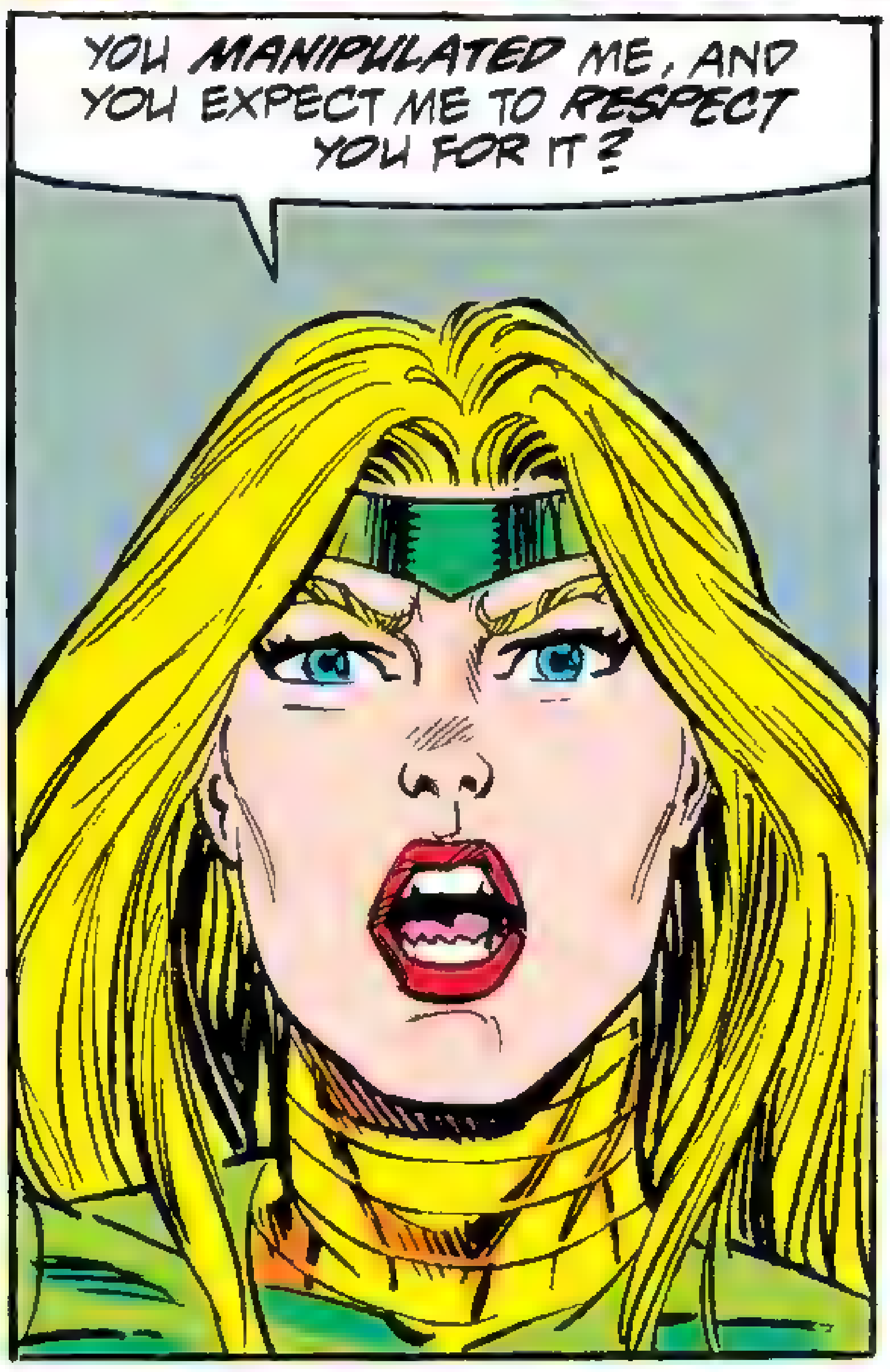

HEY! MIND THE MERCHANDISE!
IF YOU WANT ME TO DROP YOU, AGENT, JUST SAY THE WORD.
THAT CREATURE FROM KANG'S KEY JUST KEEPS GROWING WITH NO END IN SIGHT.
SO DID WE DO GOOD? WHERE'S ALLEY-OOP? DID THIS TEMPUS CHARACTER BEAT HIM AT THE ABSORPTION GAME?
IS TEMPUS GOING TO KEEP ON GROWING TILL HE CRUSHES EVERYTHING IN THE WORLD? HOW ARE WE GETTING HOME?
SOMEONE COULD TELL ME TO SHUT UP ANY MINUTE NOW.

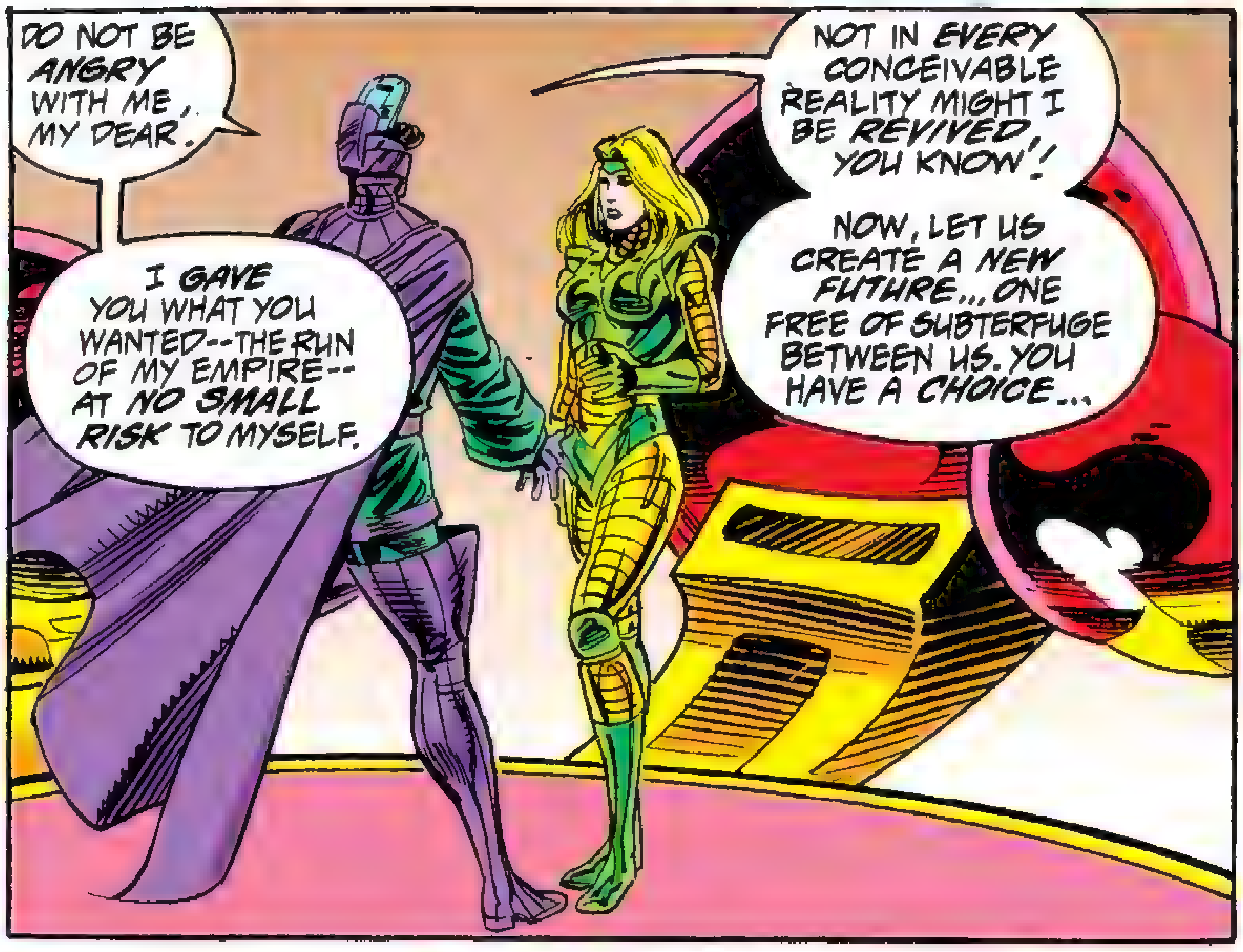

JUST THEN...
CONGRATULATIONS, AVENGERS, YOU DID WHAT I MYSELF COULD NOT.
WHERE DO YOU GET OFF CALLING YOURSELF THE HERO THAT KEPT THE BEAST FROM OVERTAKING OUR TIME WHEN YOU DIDN'T HAVE THE GUTS TO DELIVER THE KEY INTO ALIOTH'S MASS?
MY DEAR CAPTAIN, THE KEY WAS DESIGNED TO ABSORB THE ENERGIES OF ALL BEINGS WITH TEMPORAL POWER.
HAD I BEEN THERE THEN--NO MORE ME!
WE COULDN'T HAVE THAT NOW, COULD WE?
TEMPUS WILL KEEP FEEDING UPON ALIOTH'S ENERGY UNTIL HE REACHES REALITY-WIDE PROPORTIONS--
--CREATING THE TIME BARRIER BETWEEN MY REALM AND HIS!
THOU HAST USED US KANG--TO SACRIFICE ALL THY BRETHREN!
THEY WERE DEAD ANYWAY, THOR. IT WAS SIMPLY A MATTER OF WHOM THEIR LIFE FORCE WOULD SERVE--ALIOTH OR ME.
I BELIEVE THEY ALL WOULD HAVE PREFERRED TO DIE IN THE SERVICE OF THE KANGDOM.
THAT'S RIGHT. WE'VE BEEN USED, AVENGERS--WE'VE BEEN PAWNS OF SOMEBODY OR ANOTHER FROM THE START.
LET'S SHOW THIS TIN-PLATED TYRANT IT'S GOT TO STOP!

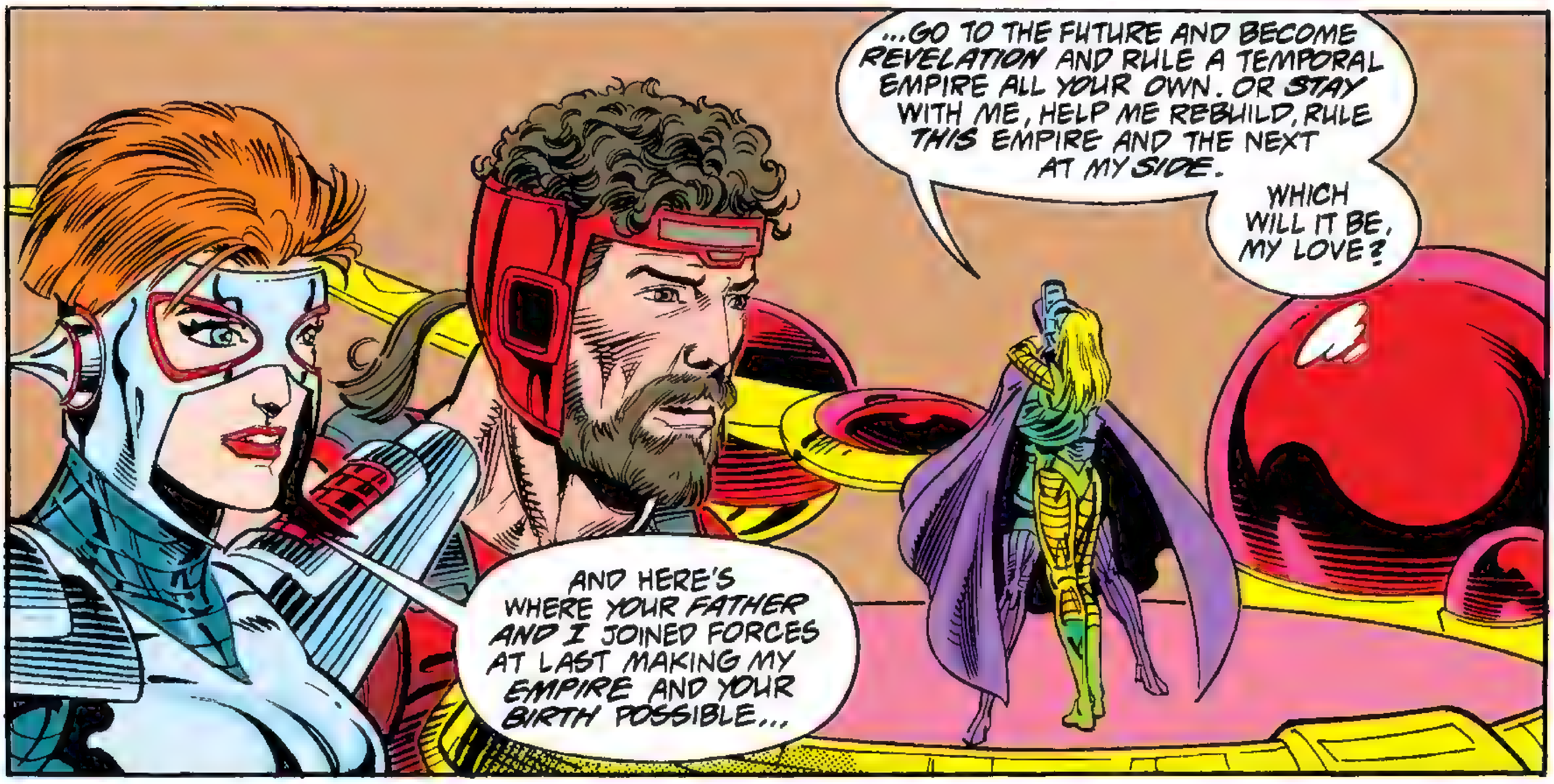

HOW DROLL.
YOUR SERVICES ARE NO LONGER **REQUIRED.**
AWAY WITH YOU! BACK TO YOUR OWN **TIMES!**
I HAVE WON. ALL OF MY MACHINATIONS HAVE **BORNE** FRUIT. ALIOTH MAY **NEVER** BE ABLE TO ATTACK ME AGAIN.
BUT NOW... THE **AFTERMATH.** EDIFICES TO **REPAIR.** NEW COUNCIL **MEMBERS** TO **RECRUIT.** NEW CONQUESTS TO **LAUNCH.**
AH, **RAVONNA.** I WAS WONDERING WHEN YOU WOULD **ARRIVE.**
YOU SAW ALL THAT TRANSPIRED?
YES.
GOOD. THEN YOU KNOW THAT ALL HAS ENDED **WELL.**
COME. I BELIEVE IT IS TIME WE HAD OURSELVES A **SERIOUS** TALK--
--**MAN** TO **WOMAN.**

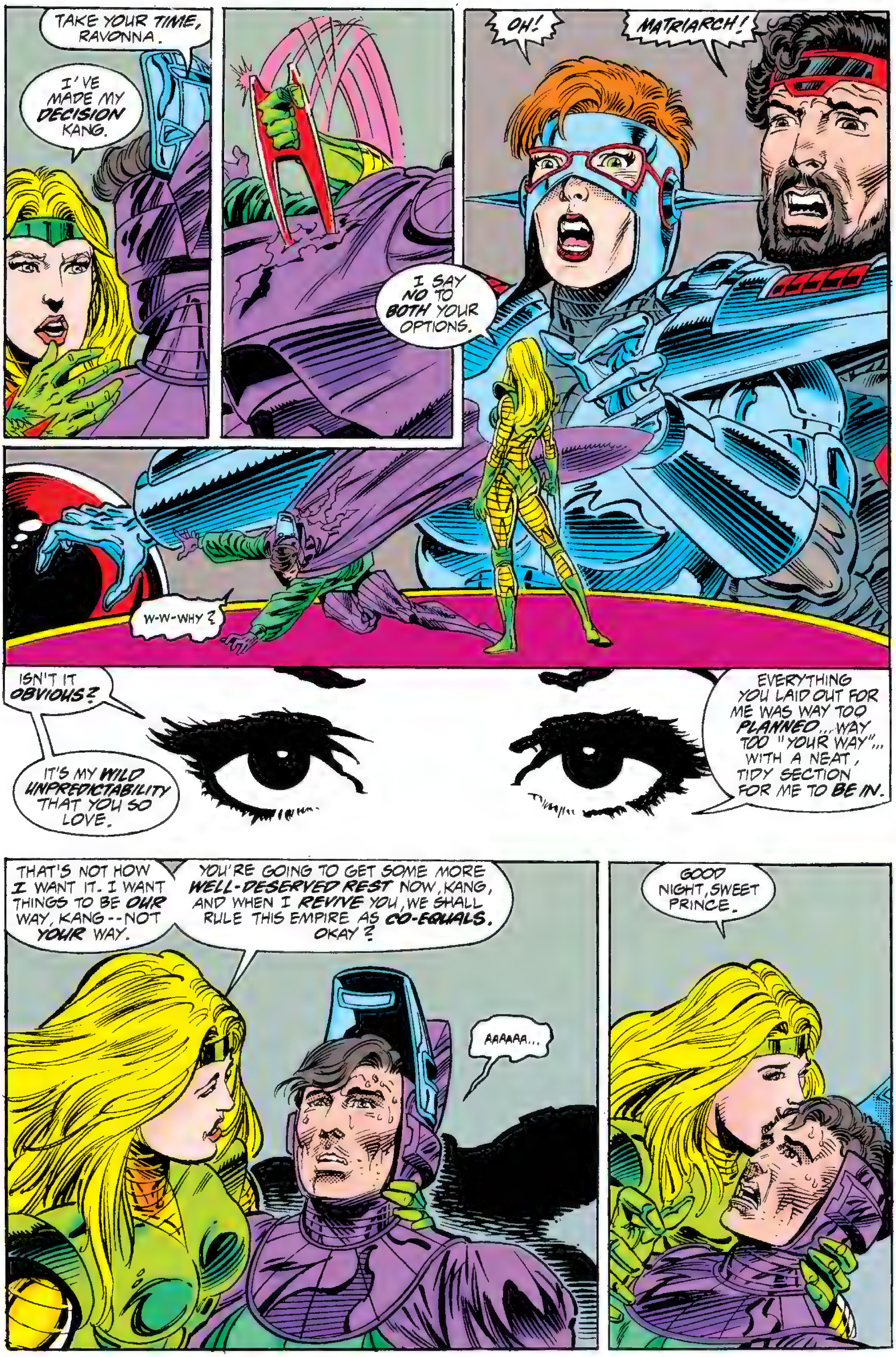

ONCE UPON A TIME, MY PRINCESS, I FELL IN LOVE WITH YOU, AS THE ANCIENT EXPRESSION GOES. THEN YOUR INNOCENCE AND NAIVETE GREW TO BORE ME.
BECAUSE OF MY INDIFFERENCE YOU REINVENTED YOURSELF AS THE ASSASSIN TERMINATRIX AND TRIED TO KILL ME.
SUDDENLY YOU BECAME WILD, UNPREDICTABLE, AND UTTERLY FASCINATING.

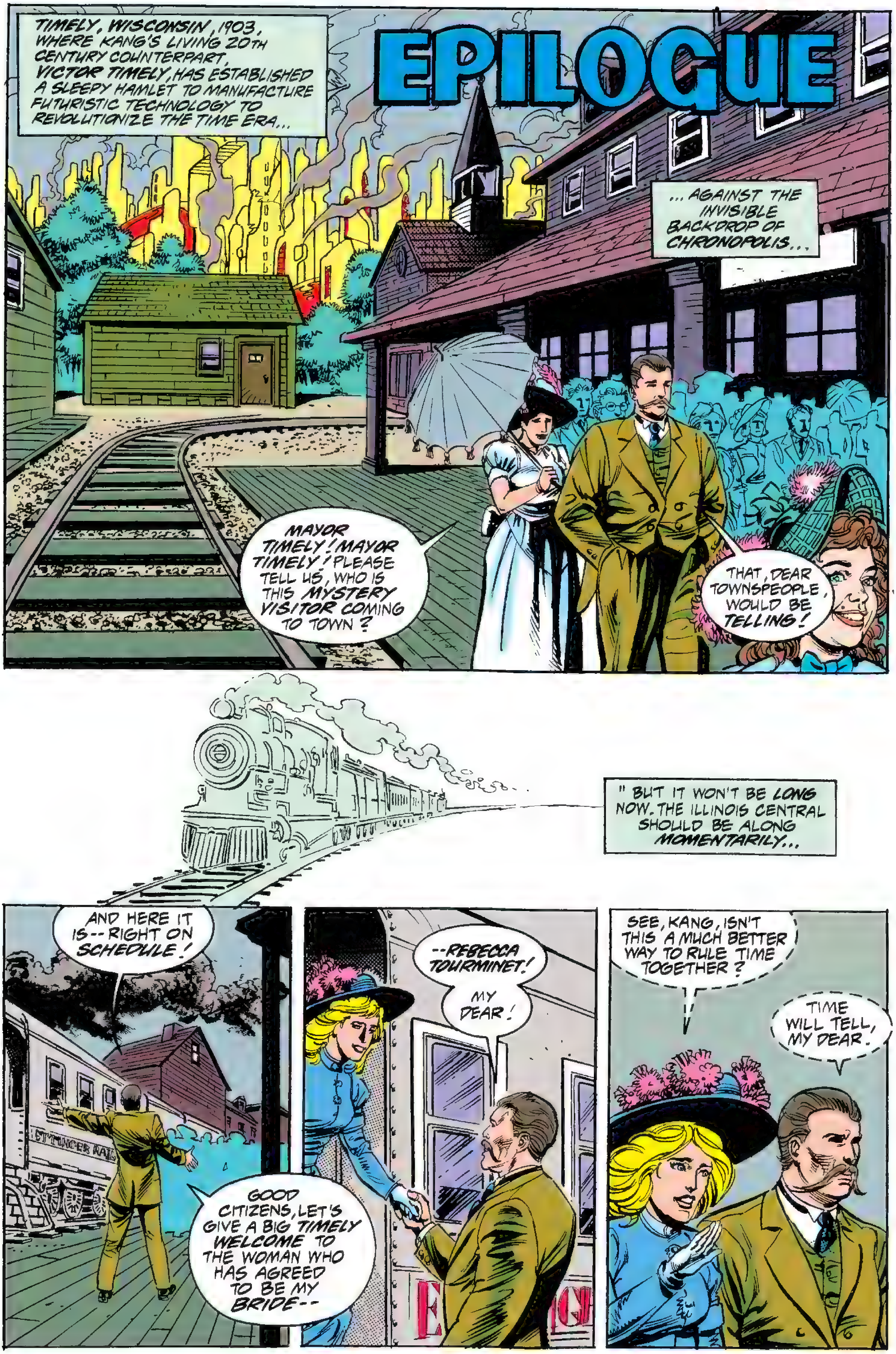

"I ADMIT THAT I PURPOSELY LAID MY LIFE DOWN FOR YOU* I WISHED FOR YOU TO LEARN TO APPRECIATE ME FOR WHAT I AM AND WHAT I HAVE ACCOMPLISHED...
"...AND WHAT BETTER WAY THAN TO LET YOU TRY TO RULE MY REALM IN MY STEAD."
*AVENGERS ANNUAL #21. --RALF-O

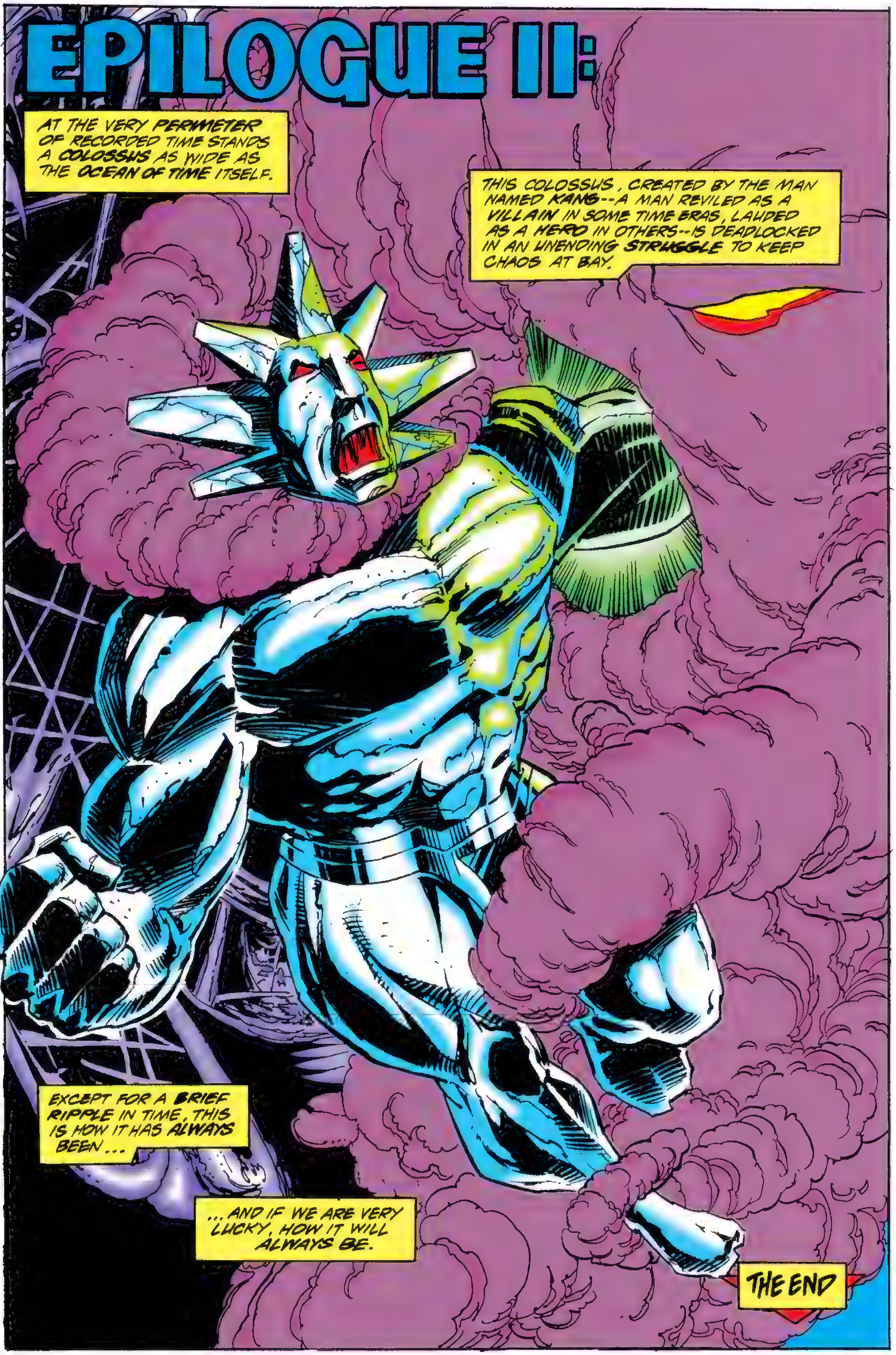

YOU MANIPULATED ME, AND YOU EXPECT ME TO RESPECT YOU FOR IT?


DO NOT BE ANGRY WITH ME, MY DEAR.
I GAVE YOU WHAT YOU WANTED--THE RUN OF MY EMPIRE--AT NO SMALL RISK TO MYSELF.
NOT IN EVERY CONCEIVABLE REALITY MIGHT I BE REVIVED, YOU KNOW!
NOW, LET US CREATE A NEW FUTURE... ONE FREE OF SUBTERFUGE BETWEEN US. YOU HAVE A CHOICE...


...GO TO THE FUTURE AND BECOME REVELATION AND RULE A TEMPORAL EMPIRE ALL YOUR OWN. OR STAY WITH ME, HELP ME REBUILD, RULE THIS EMPIRE AND THE NEXT AT MY SIDE.
WHICH WILL IT BE, MY LOVE?
AND HERE'S WHERE YOUR FATHER AND I JOINED FORCES AT LAST MAKING MY EMPIRE AND YOUR BIRTH POSSIBLE...


TAKE YOUR TIME, RAVONNA.
I'VE MADE MY DECISION KANG.
OH!
MATRIARCH!
I SAY NO TO BOTH YOUR OPTIONS.
W-W-WHY?
ISN'T IT OBVIOUS?
IT'S MY WILD UNPREDICTABILITY THAT YOU SO LOVE.
EVERYTHING YOU LAID OUT FOR ME WAS WAY TOO PLANNED... WAY TOO "YOUR WAY"... WITH A NEAT, TIDY SECTION FOR ME TO BE IN.
THAT'S NOT HOW I WANT IT. I WANT THINGS TO BE OUR WAY, KANG--NOT YOUR WAY.
YOU'RE GOING TO GET SOME MORE WELL-DESERVED REST NOW, KANG, AND WHEN I REVIVE YOU, WE SHALL RULE THIS EMPIRE AS CO-EQUALS. OKAY?
AAAAAA...
GOOD NIGHT, SWEET PRINCE.


TIMELY, WISCONSIN, 1903, WHERE KANG'S LIVING 20TH CENTURY COUNTERPART, VICTOR TIMELY, HAS ESTABLISHED A SLEEPY HAMLET TO MANUFACTURE FUTURISTIC TECHNOLOGY TO REVOLUTIONIZE THE TIME ERA...
EPILOGUE
...AGAINST THE INVISIBLE BACKDROP OF CHRONOPOLIS...
MAYOR TIMELY! MAYOR TIMELY! PLEASE TELL US, WHO IS THIS MYSTERY VISITOR COMING TO TOWN?
THAT, DEAR TOWNSPEOPLE, WOULD BE TELLING!
"BUT IT WON'T BE LONG NOW. THE ILLINOIS CENTRAL SHOULD BE ALONG MOMENTARILY...
AND HERE IT IS--RIGHT ON SCHEDULE!
GOOD CITIZENS, LET'S GIVE A BIG TIMELY WELCOME TO THE WOMAN WHO HAS AGREED TO BE MY BRIDE--
--REBECCA TOURMINET!
MY DEAR!
SEE, KANG, ISN'T THIS A MUCH BETTER WAY TO RULE TIME TOGETHER?
TIME WILL TELL, MY DEAR.


EPILOGUE II:
AT THE VERY PERIMETER OF RECORDED TIME STANDS A COLOSSUS AS WIDE AS THE OCEAN OF TIME ITSELF.
THIS COLOSSUS, CREATED BY THE MAN NAMED KANG--A MAN REVILED AS A VILLAIN IN SOME TIME ERAS, LAUDED AS A HERO IN OTHERS--IS DEADLOCKED IN AN UNENDING STRUGGLE TO KEEP CHAOS AT BAY.
EXCEPT FOR A BRIEF RIPPLE IN TIME, THIS IS HOW IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN...
...AND IF WE ARE VERY LUCKY, HOW IT WILL ALWAYS BE.
THE END

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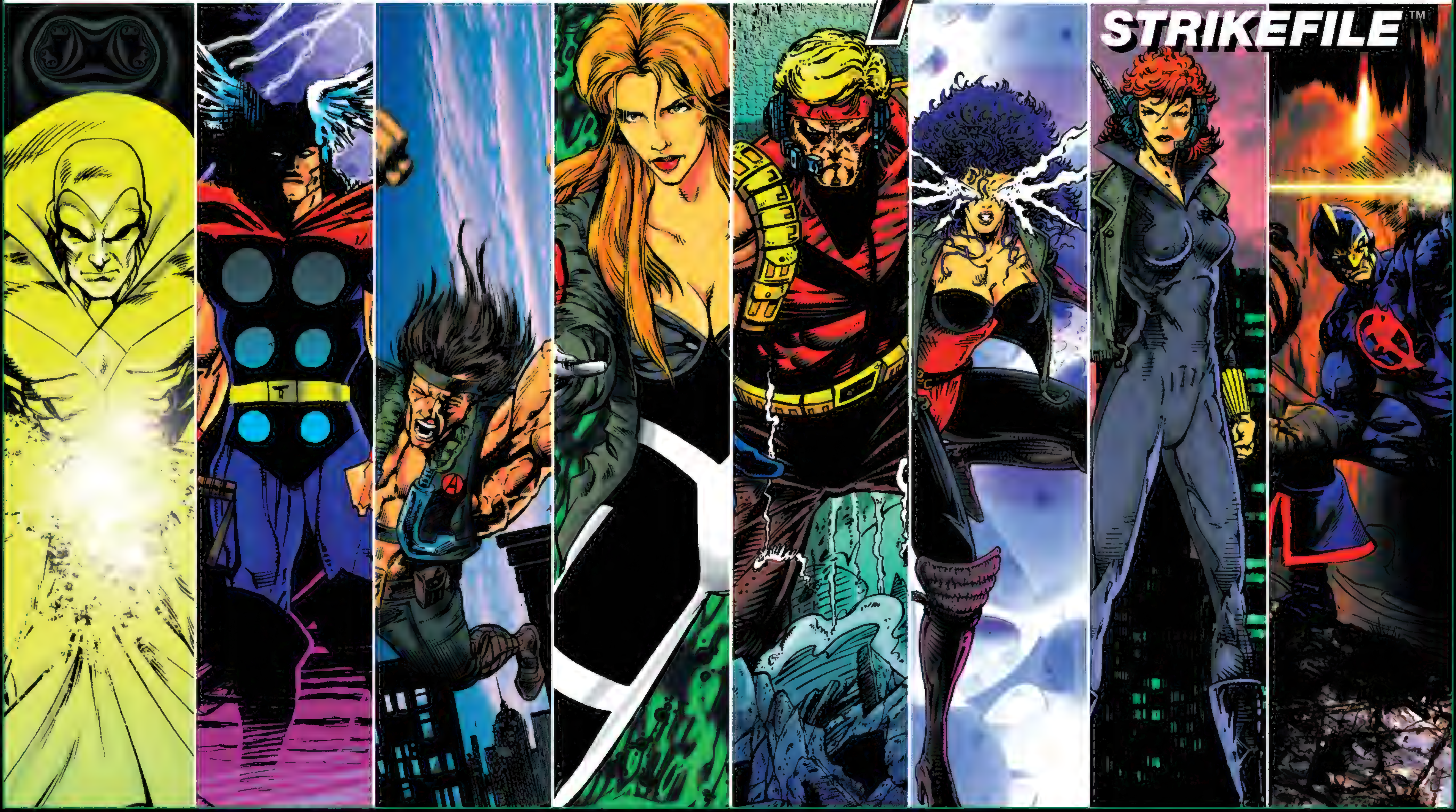

AVENGERS STRIKE FILE

COMPUTER GRAPHICS
AND ENHANCEMENTS
DAVE HORNSBY

GALACTIC MOURNING

WRITTEN BY CEFN RIDOUT
VISUALIZED BY DAVE HORNSBY

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RALPH MACCHIO GROUP EDITOR
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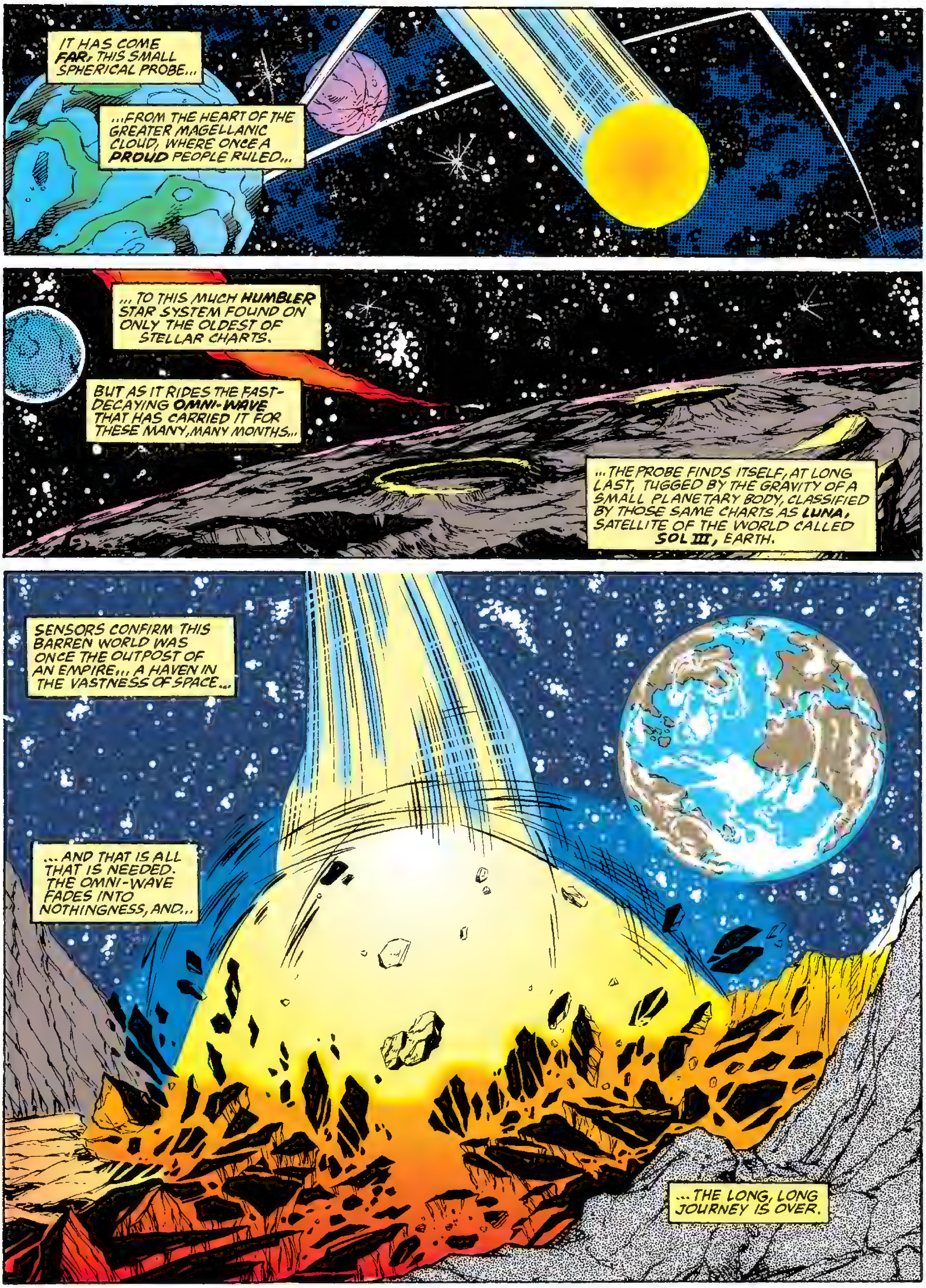
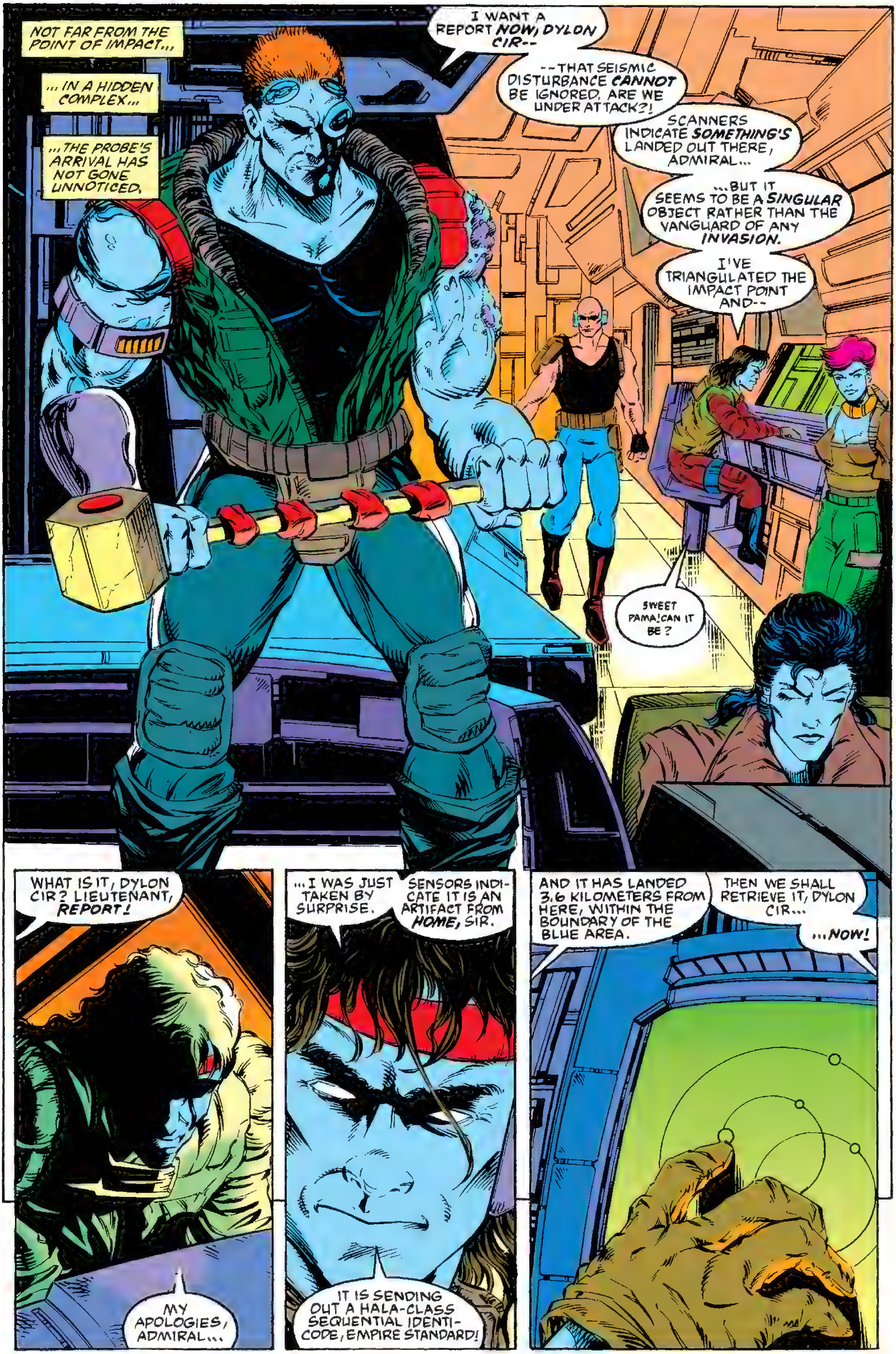
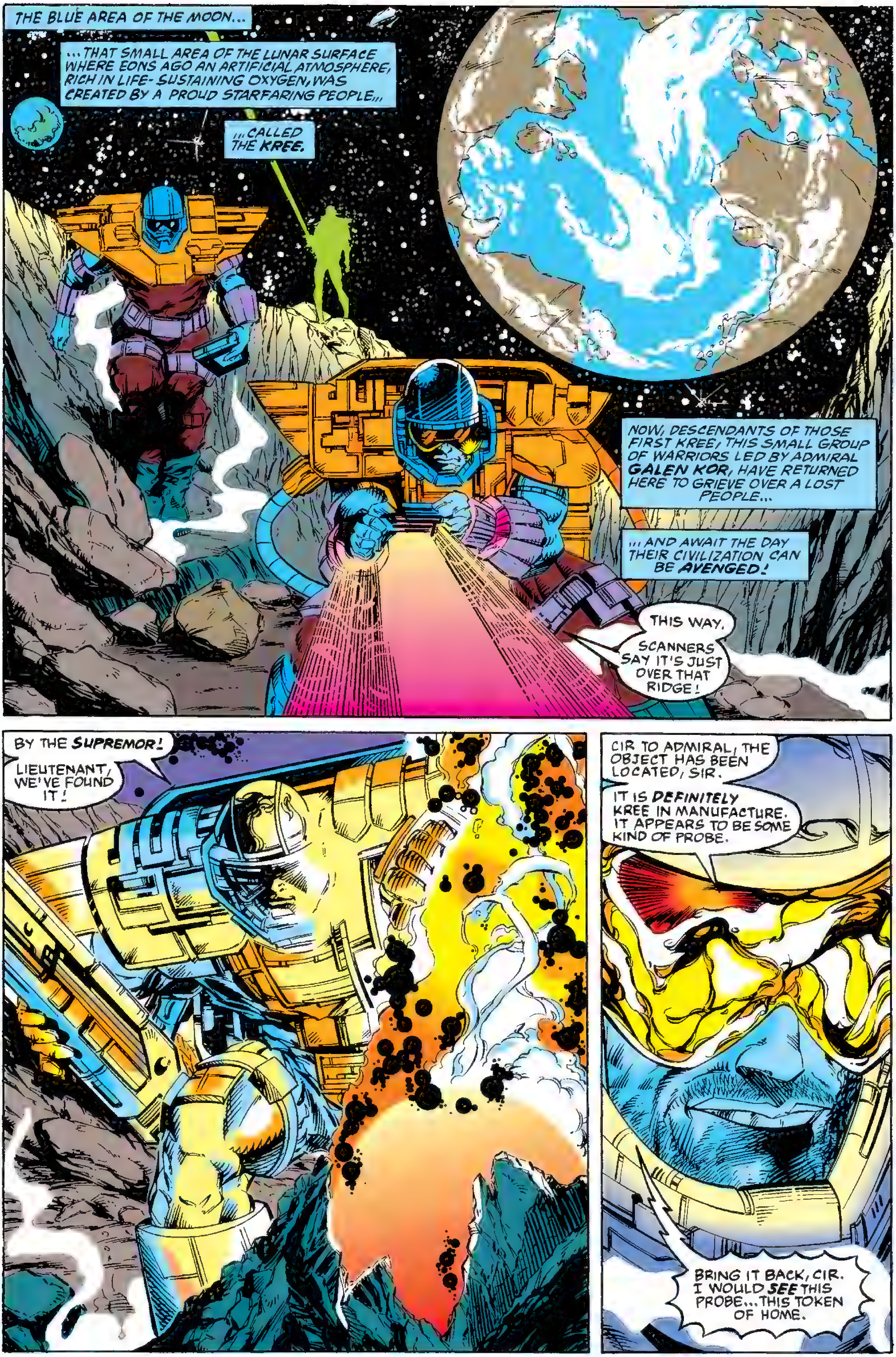
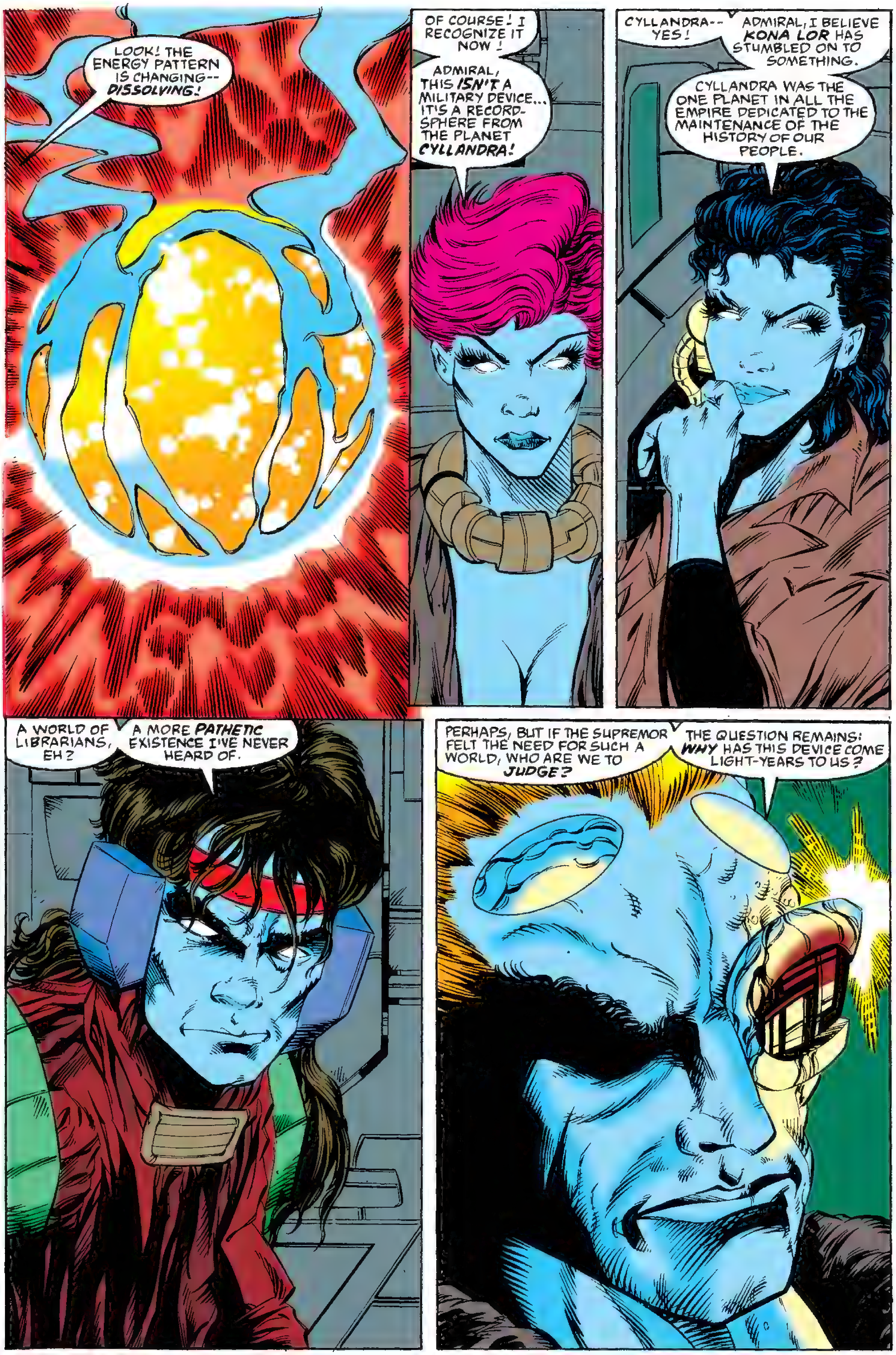

IT HAS COME FAR, THIS SMALL SPHERICAL PROBE...
...FROM THE HEART OF THE GREATER MAGELLANIC CLOUD, WHERE ONCE A PROUD PEOPLE RULED...
...TO THIS MUCH HUMBLER STAR SYSTEM FOUND ON ONLY THE OLDEST OF STELLAR CHARTS.
BUT AS IT RIDES THE FAST-DECAYING OMNI-WAVE THAT HAS CARRIED IT FOR THESE MANY, MANY MONTHS...
...THE PROBE FINDS ITSELF, AT LONG LAST, TUGGED BY THE GRAVITY OF A SMALL PLANETARY BODY, CLASSIFIED BY THOSE SAME CHARTS AS LUNA, SATELLITE OF THE WORLD CALLED SOL III, EARTH.
SENSORS CONFIRM THIS BARREN WORLD WAS ONCE THE OUTPOST OF AN EMPIRE... A HAVEN IN THE VASTNESS OF SPACE...
...AND THAT IS ALL THAT IS NEEDED. THE OMNI-WAVE FADES INTO NOTHINGNESS, AND...
...THE LONG, LONG JOURNEY IS OVER.

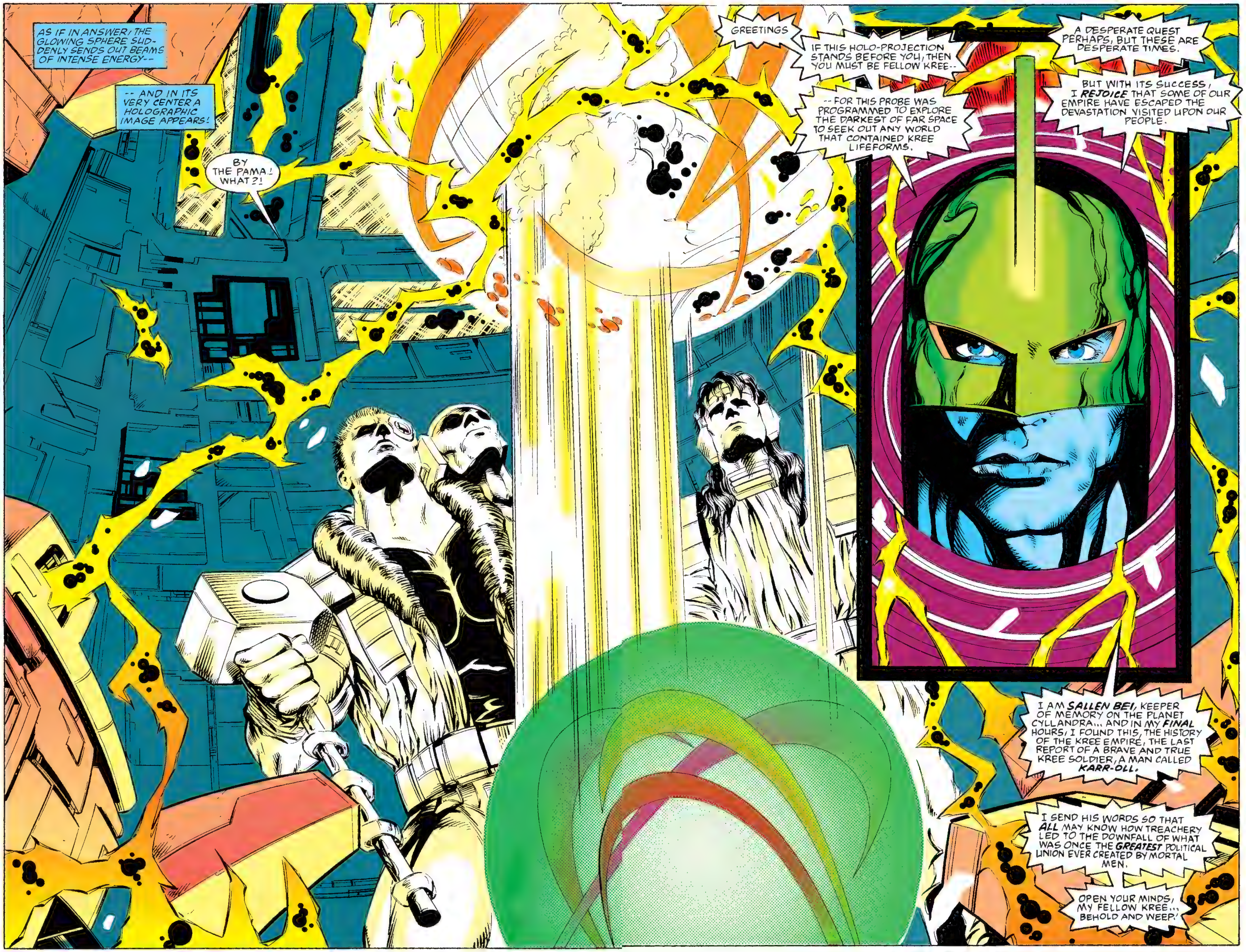
BOB HARRAS writer
JEFF MOORE penciler
MIKE SELLERS inker
MICHAEL HIGGINS letterer
NEL YOMTOV colorist
RICHARD ASHFORD editor

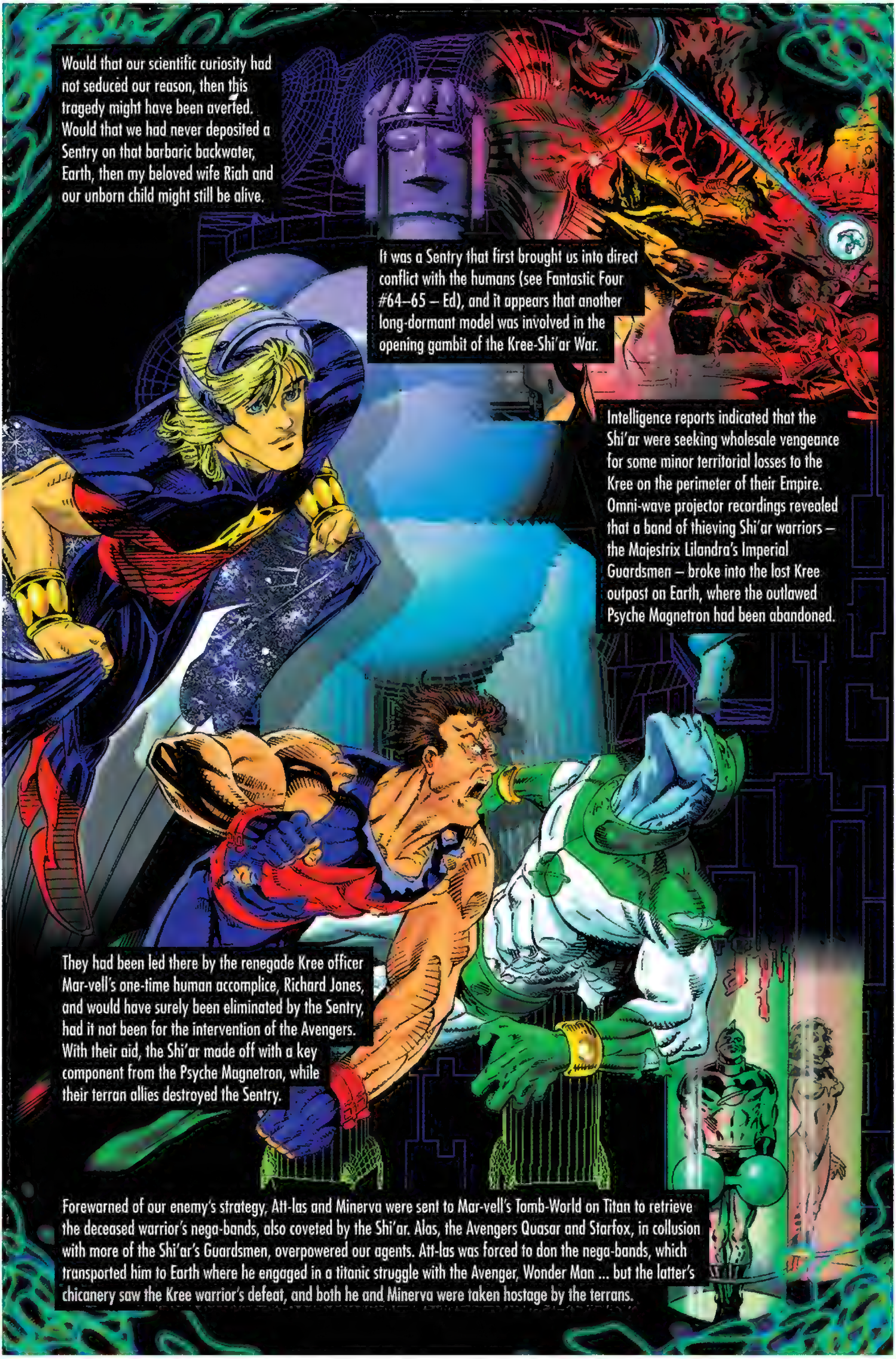

NOT FAR FROM THE POINT OF IMPACT...
...IN A HIDDEN COMPLEX...
...THE PROBE'S ARRIVAL HAS NOT GONE UNNOTICED.
I WANT A REPORT NOW, DYLON CIR--
--THAT SEISMIC DISTURBANCE CANNOT BE IGNORED. ARE WE UNDER ATTACK?!
SCANNERS INDICATE SOMETHING'S LANDED OUT THERE, ADMIRAL...
...BUT IT SEEMS TO BE A SINGULAR OBJECT RATHER THAN THE VANGUARD OF ANY INVASION.
I'VE TRIANGULATED THE IMPACT POINT AND--
SWEET PAMA! CAN IT BE?
WHAT IS IT, DYLON CIR? LIEUTENANT, REPORT!
MY APOLOGIES, ADMIRAL...
...I WAS JUST TAKEN BY SURPRISE.
SENSORS INDICATE IT IS AN ARTIFACT FROM HOME, SIR.
IT IS SENDING OUT A HALA-CLASS SEQUENTIAL IDENTI-CODE, EMPIRE STANDARD!
AND IT HAS LANDED 3.6 KILOMETERS FROM HERE, WITHIN THE BOUNDARY OF THE BLUE AREA.
THEN WE SHALL RETRIEVE IT, DYLON CIR...
...NOW!


THE BLUE AREA OF THE MOON...
...THAT SMALL AREA OF THE LUNAR SURFACE WHERE EONS AGO AN ARTIFICIAL ATMOSPHERE, RICH IN LIFE-SUSTAINING OXYGEN, WAS CREATED BY A PROUD STARFARING PEOPLE...
...CALLED THE **KREE.**
NOW, DESCENDANTS OF THOSE FIRST KREE, THIS SMALL GROUP OF WARRIORS LED BY ADMIRAL **GALEN KOR**, HAVE RETURNED HERE TO GRIEVE OVER A LOST PEOPLE...
...AND AWAIT THE DAY THEIR CIVILIZATION CAN BE **AVENGED!**
THIS WAY.
SCANNERS SAY IT'S JUST OVER THAT RIDGE!
BY THE **SUPREMOR!**
LIEUTENANT, WE'VE FOUND IT!
CIR TO ADMIRAL, THE OBJECT HAS BEEN LOCATED, SIR.
IT IS **DEFINITELY** KREE IN MANUFACTURE. IT APPEARS TO BE SOME KIND OF PROBE.
BRING IT BACK, CIR. I WOULD **SEE** THIS PROBE...THIS TOKEN OF HOME.

AND WITHIN THE HOUR...
ADMIRAL, HAVE YOU EVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE IT?
NO.
IT'S OBVIOUSLY COME THROUGH A LOT ON ITS JOURNEY. A MAGNO-SCAN REVEALS *THOUSANDS* OF MICRO-FRACTURES FROM IMPACT WITH STELLAR PARTICLES...
...BUT ITS DESIGN IS *UNFAMILIAR* TO ME.
EVEN ITS SHIELDING SEEMS--
VVMMM
--BY HALA'S RINGS!!
THE PROBE'S OUTER SHELL *DISSOLVED* AT MY VERY TOUCH.
REVEALING A CONCENTRATED ENERGY SPHERE!


LOOK! THE ENERGY PATTERN IS CHANGING-- *DISSOLVING!*
OF COURSE! I RECOGNIZE IT NOW!
ADMIRAL, THIS *ISN'T* A MILITARY DEVICE... IT'S A RECORD-SPHERE FROM THE PLANET *CYLLANDRA!*
CYLLANDRA-- YES!
ADMIRAL, I BELIEVE *KONA LOR* HAS STUMBLED ON TO SOMETHING.
CYLLANDRA WAS THE ONE PLANET IN ALL THE EMPIRE DEDICATED TO THE MAINTENANCE OF THE HISTORY OF OUR PEOPLE.
A WORLD OF LIBRARIANS, EH?
A MORE *PATHETIC* EXISTENCE I'VE NEVER HEARD OF.
PERHAPS, BUT IF THE SUPREMOR FELT THE NEED FOR SUCH A WORLD, WHO ARE WE TO *JUDGE?*
THE QUESTION REMAINS: *WHY* HAS THIS DEVICE COME LIGHT-YEARS TO US?


AS IF IN ANSWER, THE GLOWING SPHERE SUDDENLY SENDS OUT BEAMS OF INTENSE ENERGY--
-- AND IN ITS VERY CENTER A HOLOGRAPHIC IMAGE APPEARS!
BY THE PAMA! WHAT?!
GREETINGS
IF THIS HOLO-PROJECTION STANDS BEFORE YOU, THEN YOU MUST BE FELLOW KREE--
-- FOR THIS PROBE WAS PROGRAMMED TO EXPLORE THE DARKEST OF FAR SPACE TO SEEK OUT ANY WORLD THAT CONTAINED KREE LIFEFORMS.
A DESPERATE QUEST PERHAPS, BUT THESE ARE DESPERATE TIMES.
BUT WITH ITS SUCCESS, I **REJOICE** THAT SOME OF OUR EMPIRE HAVE ESCAPED THE DEVASTATION VISITED UPON OUR PEOPLE.
I AM **SALLEN BEI**, KEEPER OF MEMORY ON THE PLANET CYLLANDRA... AND IN MY **FINAL** HOURS, I FOUND THIS, THE HISTORY OF THE KREE EMPIRE, THE LAST REPORT OF A BRAVE AND TRUE KREE SOLDIER, A MAN CALLED **KARR-OLL**.
I SEND HIS WORDS SO THAT **ALL** MAY KNOW HOW TREACHERY LED TO THE DOWNFALL OF WHAT WAS ONCE THE **GREATEST** POLITICAL UNION EVER CREATED BY MORTAL MEN.
OPEN YOUR MINDS, MY FELLOW KREE... BEHOLD AND WEEP!



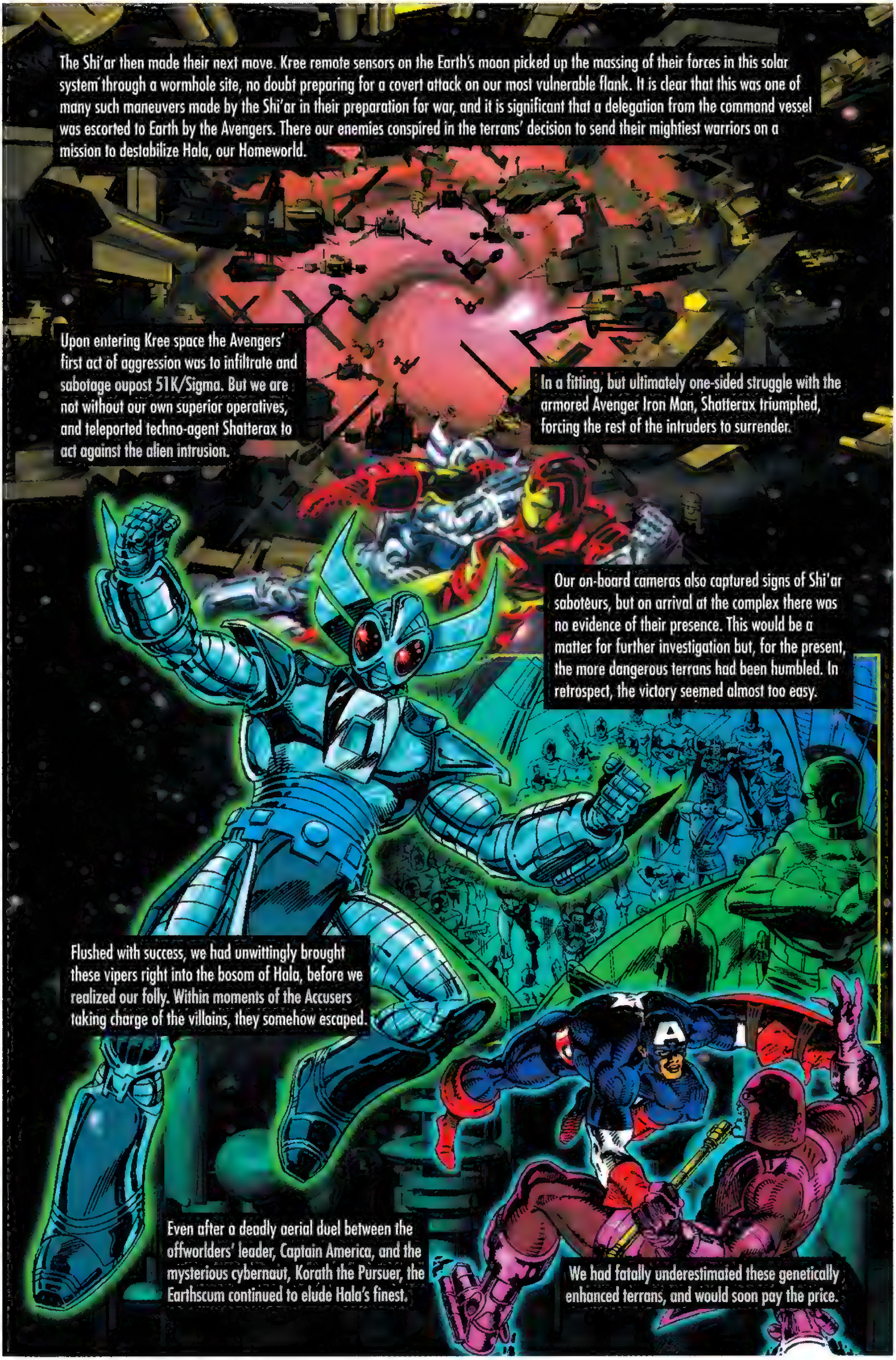
Would that our scientific curiosity had not seduced our reason, then this tragedy might have been averted. Would that we had never deposited a Sentry on that barbaric backwater, Earth, then my beloved wife Riah and our unborn child might still be alive.

It was a Sentry that first brought us into direct conflict with the humans (see Fantastic Four #64–65 – Ed), and it appears that another long-dormant model was involved in the opening gambit of the Kree-Shi'ar War.

Intelligence reports indicated that the Shi'ar were seeking wholesale vengeance for some minor territorial losses to the Kree on the perimeter of their Empire. Omni-wave projector recordings revealed that a band of thieving Shi'ar warriors – the Majestrix Lilandra's Imperial Guardsmen – broke into the lost Kree outpost on Earth, where the outlawed Psyche Magnetron had been abandoned.

They had been led there by the renegade Kree officer Mar-vell's one-time human accomplice, Richard Jones, and would have surely been eliminated by the Sentry, had it not been for the intervention of the Avengers. With their aid, the Shi'ar made off with a key component from the Psyche Magnetron, while their terran allies destroyed the Sentry.

Forewarned of our enemy's strategy, Att-las and Minerva were sent to Mar-vell's Tomb-World on Titan to retrieve the deceased warrior's nega-bands, also coveted by the Shi'ar. Alas, the Avengers Quasar and Starfox, in collusion with more of the Shi'ar's Guardsmen, overpowered our agents. Att-las was forced to don the nega-bands, which transported him to Earth where he engaged in a titanic struggle with the Avenger, Wonder Man ... but the latter's chicanery saw the Kree warrior's defeat, and both he and Minerva were taken hostage by the terrans.



The Shi'ar then made their next move. Kree remote sensors on the Earth's moon picked up the massing of their forces in this solar system through a wormhole site, no doubt preparing for a covert attack on our most vulnerable flank. It is clear that this was one of many such maneuvers made by the Shi'ar in their preparation for war, and it is significant that a delegation from the command vessel was escorted to Earth by the Avengers. There our enemies conspired in the terrans' decision to send their mightiest warriors on a mission to destabilize Hala, our Homeworld.

Upon entering Kree space the Avengers' first act of aggression was to infiltrate and sabotage oupost 51K/Sigma. But we are not without our own superior operatives, and teleported techno-agent Shatterax to act against the alien intrusion.

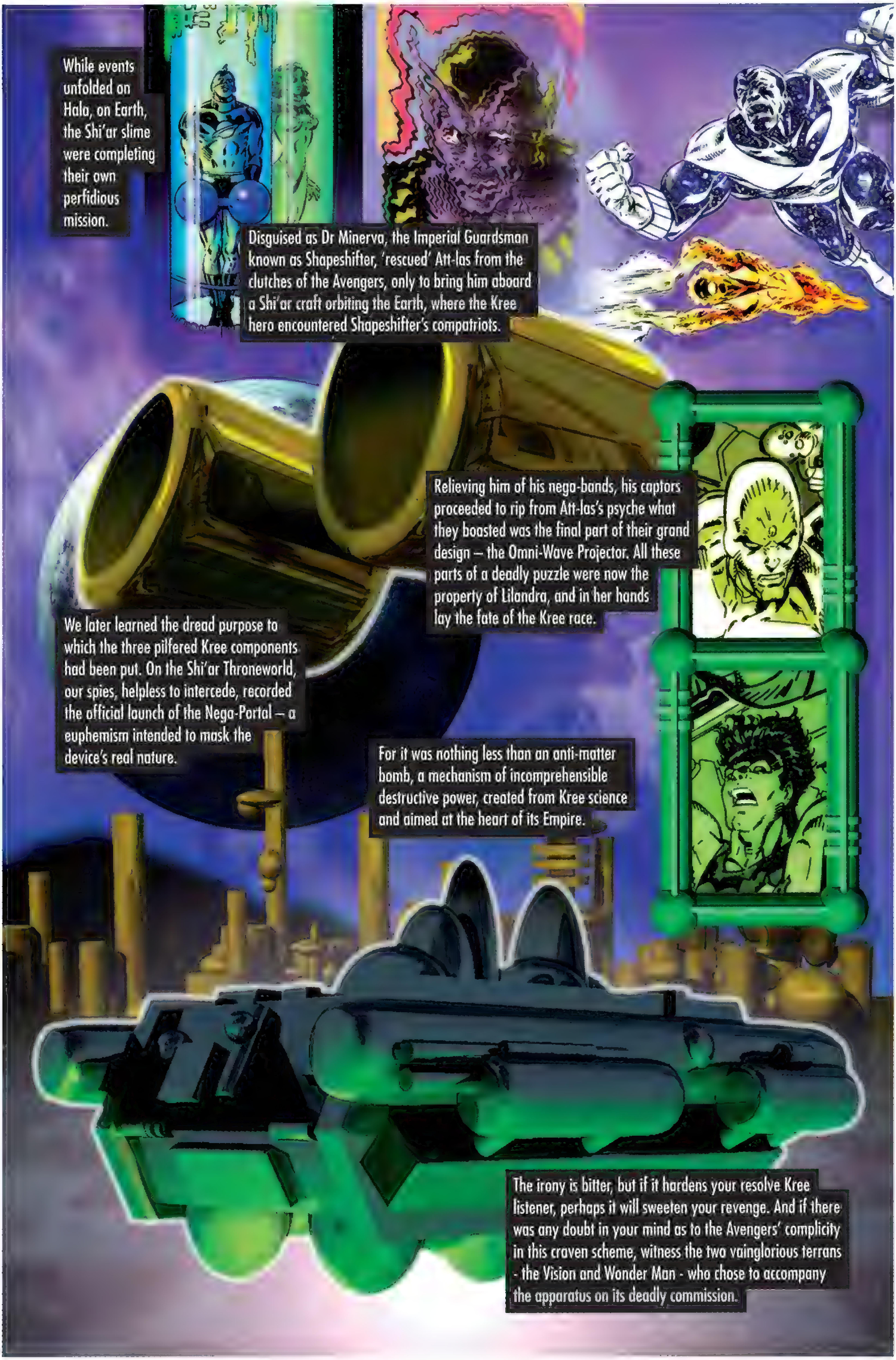
In a fitting, but ultimately one-sided struggle with the armored Avenger Iron Man, Shatterax triumphed, forcing the rest of the intruders to surrender.

Our on-board cameras also captured signs of Shi'ar saboteurs, but on arrival at the complex there was no evidence of their presence. This would be a matter for further investigation but, for the present, the more dangerous terrans had been humbled. In retrospect, the victory seemed almost too easy.

Flushed with success, we had unwittingly brought these vipers right into the bosom of Hala, before we realized our folly. Within moments of the Accusers taking charge of the villains, they somehow escaped.

Even after a deadly aerial duel between the offworlders' leader, Captain America, and the mysterious cybernaut, Korath the Pursuer, the Earthscum continued to elude Hala's finest.

We had fatally underestimated these genetically enhanced terrans, and would soon pay the price.



While events unfolded on Hala, on Earth, the Shi'ar slime were completing their own perfidious mission.

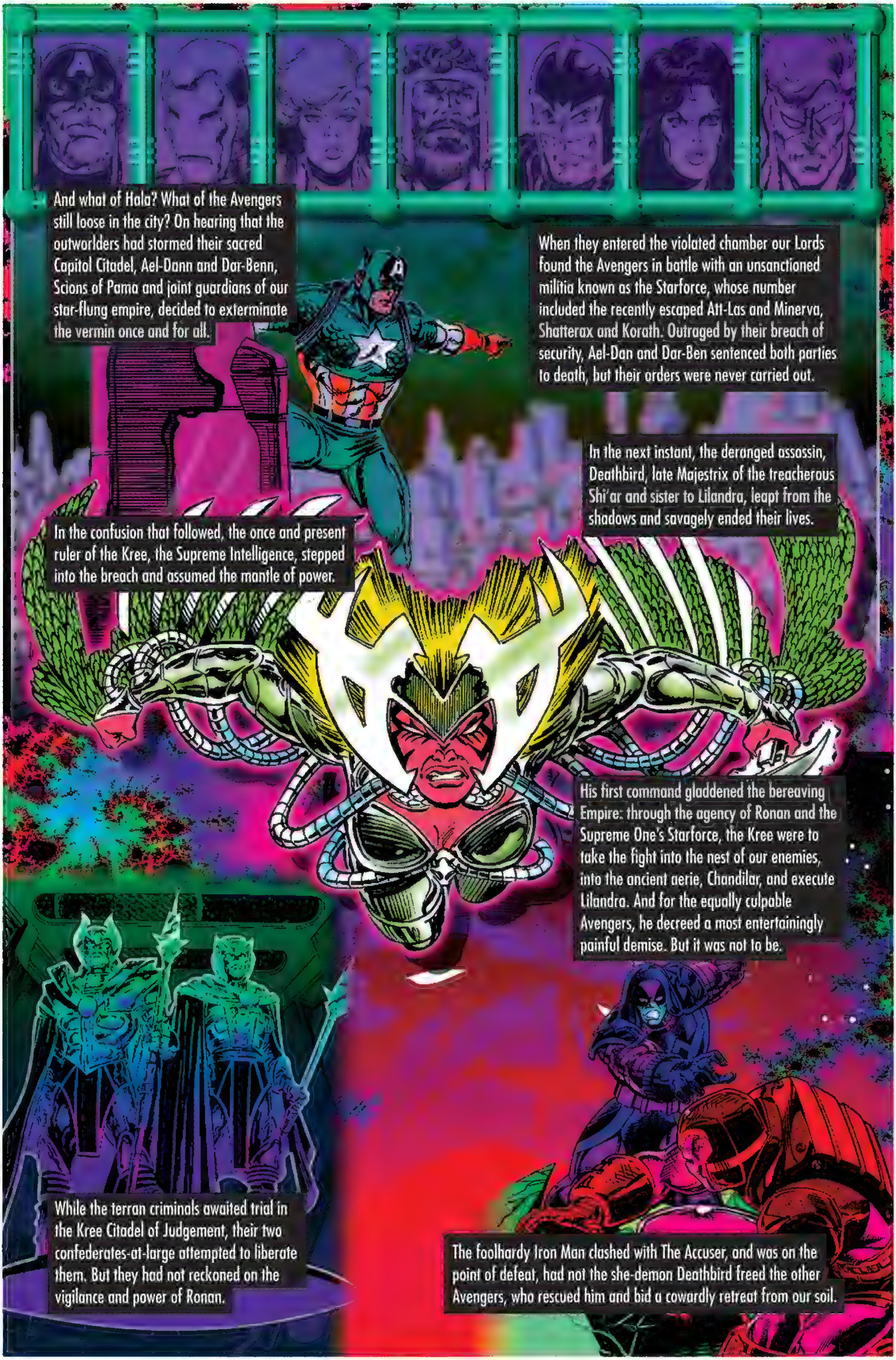
Disguised as Dr Minerva, the Imperial Guardsman known as Shapeshifter, 'rescued' Att-las from the clutches of the Avengers, only to bring him aboard a Shi'ar craft orbiting the Earth, where the Kree hero encountered Shapeshifter's compatriots.

Relieving him of his nega-bands, his captors proceeded to rip from Att-las's psyche what they boasted was the final part of their grand design – the Omni-Wave Projector. All these parts of a deadly puzzle were now the property of Lilandra, and in her hands lay the fate of the Kree race.

We later learned the dread purpose to which the three pilfered Kree components had been put. On the Shi'ar Throneworld, our spies, helpless to intercede, recorded the official launch of the Nega-Portal – a euphemism intended to mask the device's real nature.

For it was nothing less than an anti-matter bomb, a mechanism of incomprehensible destructive power, created from Kree science and aimed at the heart of its Empire.

The irony is bitter, but if it hardens your resolve Kree listener, perhaps it will sweeten your revenge. And if there was any doubt in your mind as to the Avengers' complicity in this craven scheme, witness the two vainglorious terrans - the Vision and Wonder Man - who chose to accompany the apparatus on its deadly commission.



And what of Hala? What of the Avengers still loose in the city? On hearing that the outworlders had stormed their sacred Capitol Citadel, Ael-Dann and Dar-Benn, Scions of Pama and joint guardians of our star-flung empire, decided to exterminate the vermin once and for all.

When they entered the violated chamber our Lords found the Avengers in battle with an unsanctioned militia known as the Starforce, whose number included the recently escaped Att-Las and Minerva, Shatterax and Korath. Outraged by their breach of security, Ael-Dan and Dar-Ben sentenced both parties to death, but their orders were never carried out.

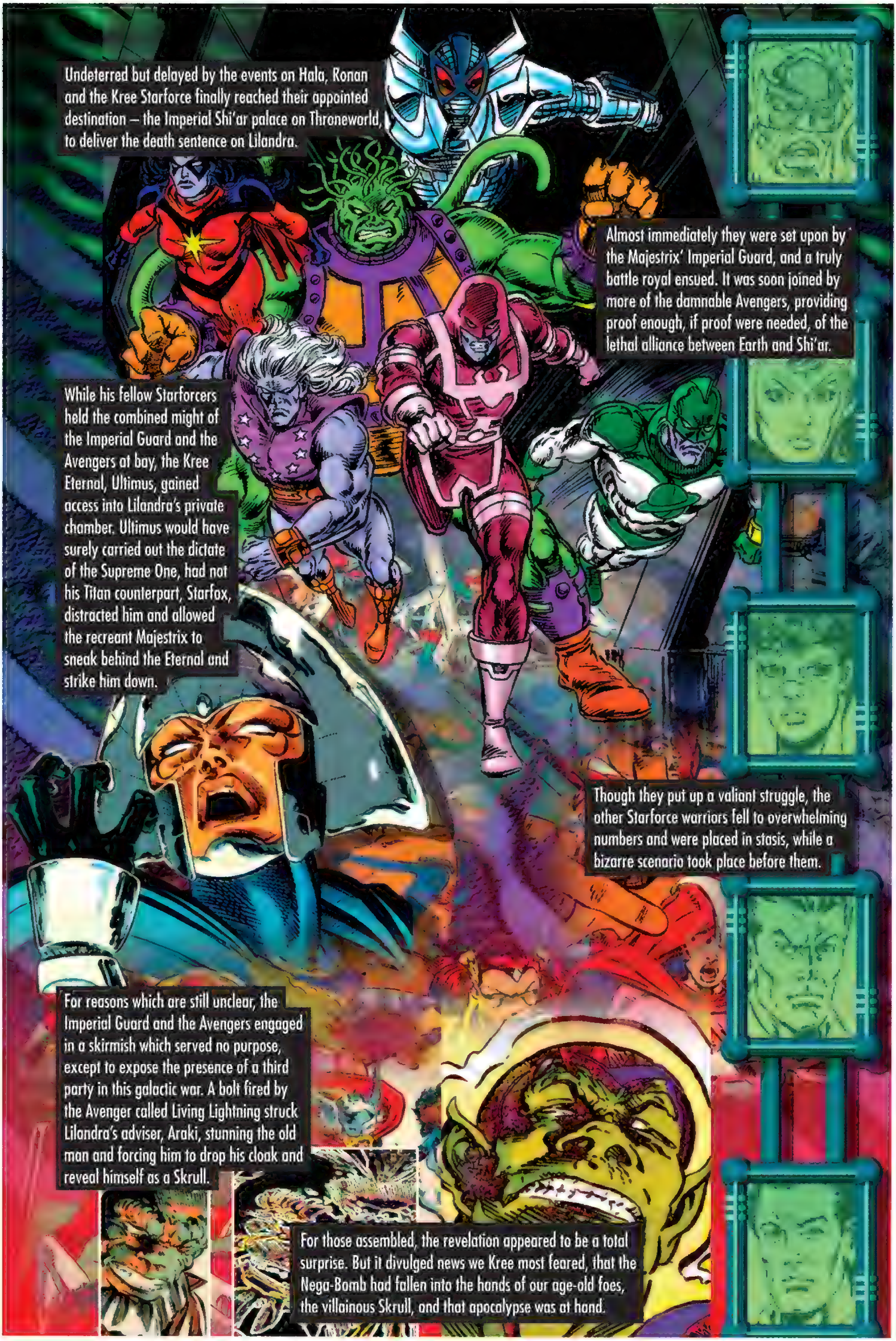
In the next instant, the deranged assassin, Deathbird, late Majestrix of the treacherous Shi'ar and sister to Lilandra, leapt from the shadows and savagely ended their lives.

In the confusion that followed, the once and present ruler of the Kree, the Supreme Intelligence, stepped into the breach and assumed the mantle of power.

His first command gladdened the bereaving Empire: through the agency of Ronan and the Supreme One's Starforce, the Kree were to take the fight into the nest of our enemies, into the ancient aerie, Chandilar, and execute Lilandra. And for the equally culpable Avengers, he decreed a most entertainingly painful demise. But it was not to be.

While the terran criminals awaited trial in the Kree Citadel of Judgement, their two confederates-at-large attempted to liberate them. But they had not reckoned on the vigilance and power of Ronan.

The foolhardy Iron Man clashed with The Accuser, and was on the point of defeat, had not the she-demon Deathbird freed the other Avengers, who rescued him and bid a cowardly retreat from our soil.



Undeterred but delayed by the events on Hala, Ronan and the Kree Starforce finally reached their appointed destination – the Imperial Shi'ar palace on Throneworld, to deliver the death sentence on Lilandra.

Almost immediately they were set upon by the Majestrix' Imperial Guard, and a truly battle royal ensued. It was soon joined by more of the damnable Avengers, providing proof enough, if proof were needed, of the lethal alliance between Earth and Shi'ar.

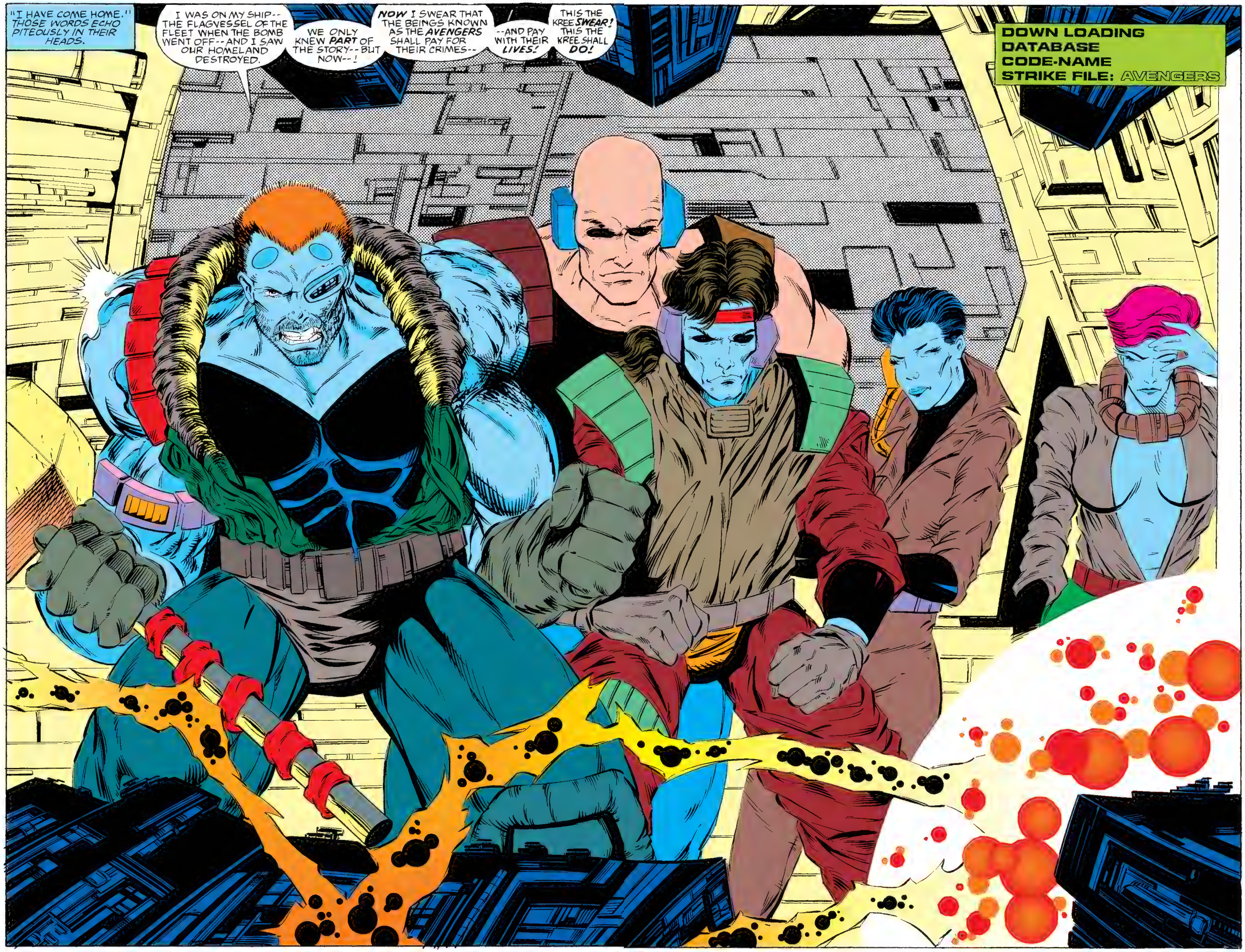
While his fellow Starforcers held the combined might of the Imperial Guard and the Avengers at bay, the Kree Eternal, Ultimus, gained access into Lilandra's private chamber. Ultimus would have surely carried out the dictate of the Supreme One, had not his Titan counterpart, Starfox, distracted him and allowed the recreant Majestrix to sneak behind the Eternal and strike him down.

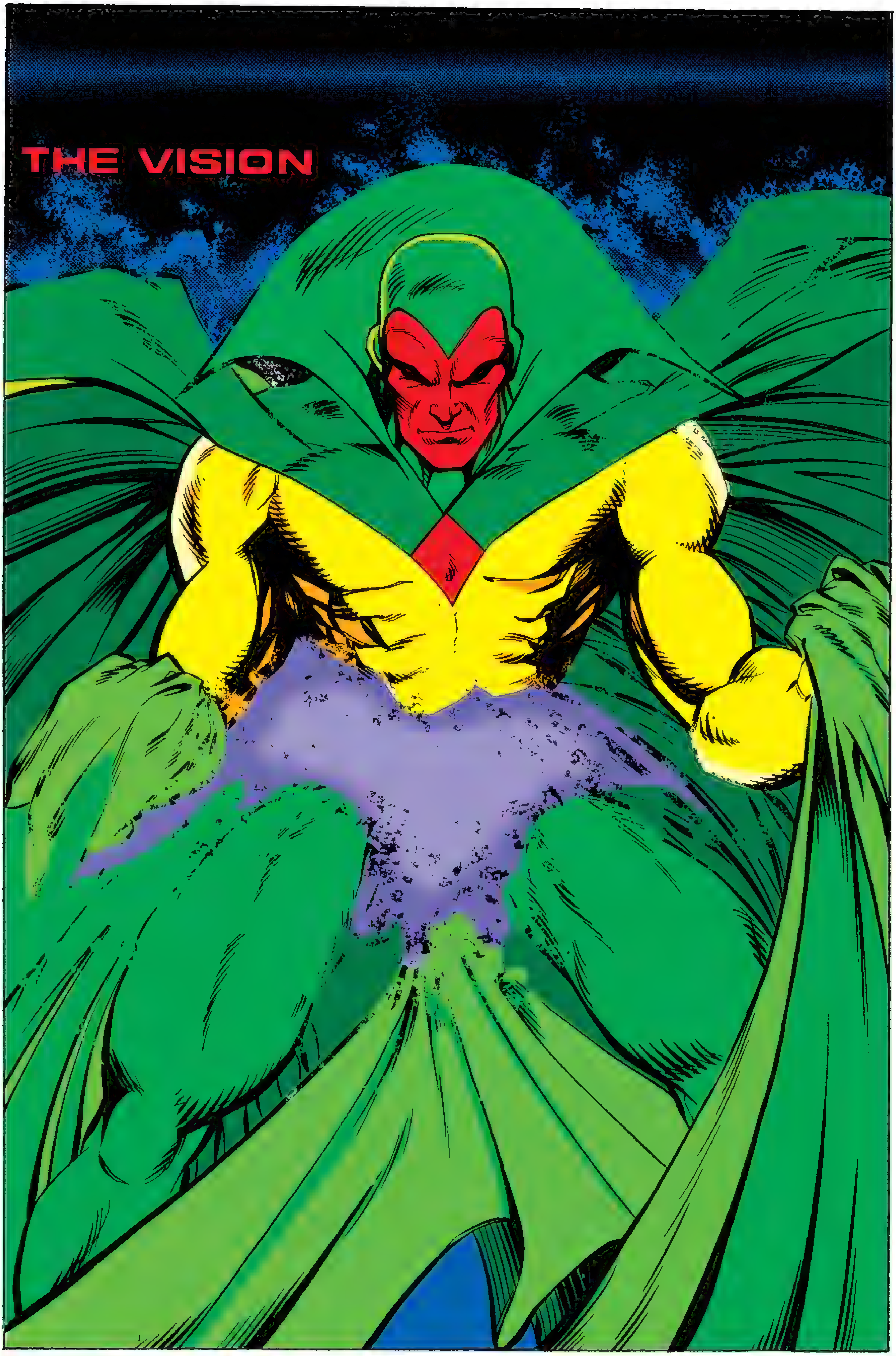
Though they put up a valiant struggle, the other Starforce warriors fell to overwhelming numbers and were placed in stasis, while a bizarre scenario took place before them.

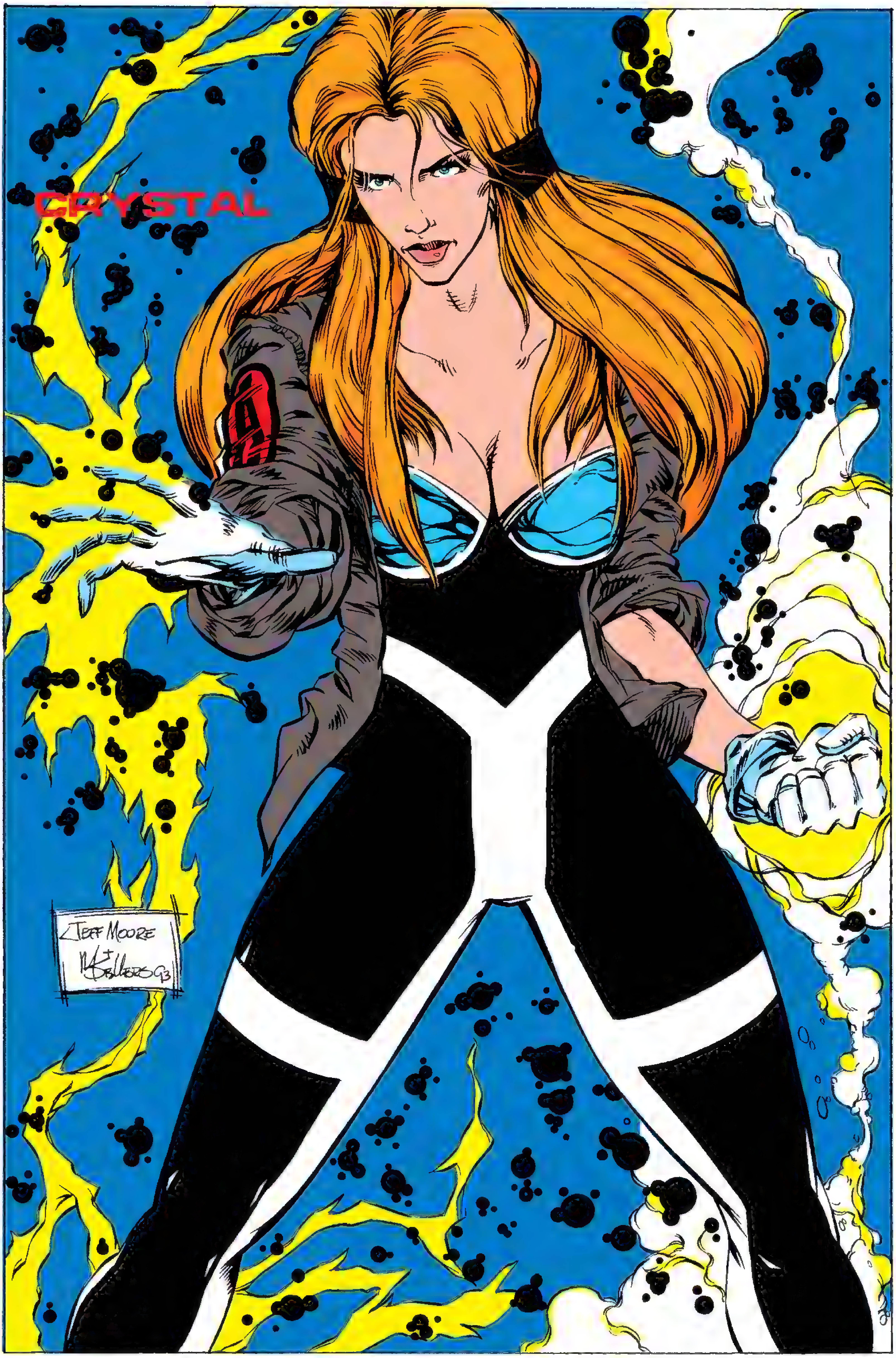
For reasons which are still unclear, the Imperial Guard and the Avengers engaged in a skirmish which served no purpose, except to expose the presence of a third party in this galactic war. A bolt fired by the Avenger called Living Lightning struck Lilandra's adviser, Araki, stunning the old man and forcing him to drop his cloak and reveal himself as a Skrull.

For those assembled, the revelation appeared to be a total surprise. But it divulged news we Kree most feared, that the Nega-Bomb had fallen into the hands of our age-old foes, the villainous Skrull, and that apocalypse was at hand.

Even though I am exceeding warp-drive, the skies about me grow brighter with the light of death, and I fear my transmission might come to an abrupt end. However, I do not relish accounting the annihilation of our once-glorious people, so I will be brief. With the Skrulls in charge of the Nega-Bomb, Ultimus was dispatched with all haste to Hala to report on their perfidy. But all efforts to prevent the inevitable were too late. Far too late.
Doomsday erupted in our midst and brought an instant end to empire. The blast obliterated everything in its path, sweeping aside planets as if they were swatted by some vengeful deity. What had taken countless millennia to create was extinguished in the space of a heartbeat. And still the shock waves surged through our system, and beyond.
Yet, not content with the extinction of billions of lives, the Avengers returned to Kree-Lar to launch an assault on the Kree citadel and take one final life, that of our sovereign, the Supreme Intelligence.
His death-cry carried the screams of his countless disinterred souls into our already overloaded transceivers – overloaded by distress calls coming in from frequencies across the empire. Though they were preferable to the appalling silence that followed.
We were returning to our borderland homeworld after victorious combat on the periphery, when the bomb exploded. Thus we escaped the brunt of the blast, but the energy waves of Lilandra's death-light were yet to run their course...
The radiance has now engulfed the ship ... chaos has broken out around me, but I am possessed of a curious calm ... I am no longer here ... I am with Riah and our newborn child ... I have come home ...


"I HAVE COME HOME." THOSE WORDS ECHO PITEOUSLY IN THEIR HEADS.
I WAS ON MY SHIP-- THE FLAGVESSEL OF THE FLEET WHEN THE BOMB WENT OFF--AND I SAW OUR HOMELAND DESTROYED.
WE ONLY KNEW PART OF THE STORY--BUT NOW--!
NOW I SWEAR THAT THE BEINGS KNOWN AS THE AVENGERS SHALL PAY FOR THEIR CRIMES--
--AND PAY WITH THEIR LIVES!
THIS THE KREE SWEAR! THIS THE KREE SHALL DO!
DOWN LOADING DATABASE CODE-NAME STRIKE FILE: AVENGERS

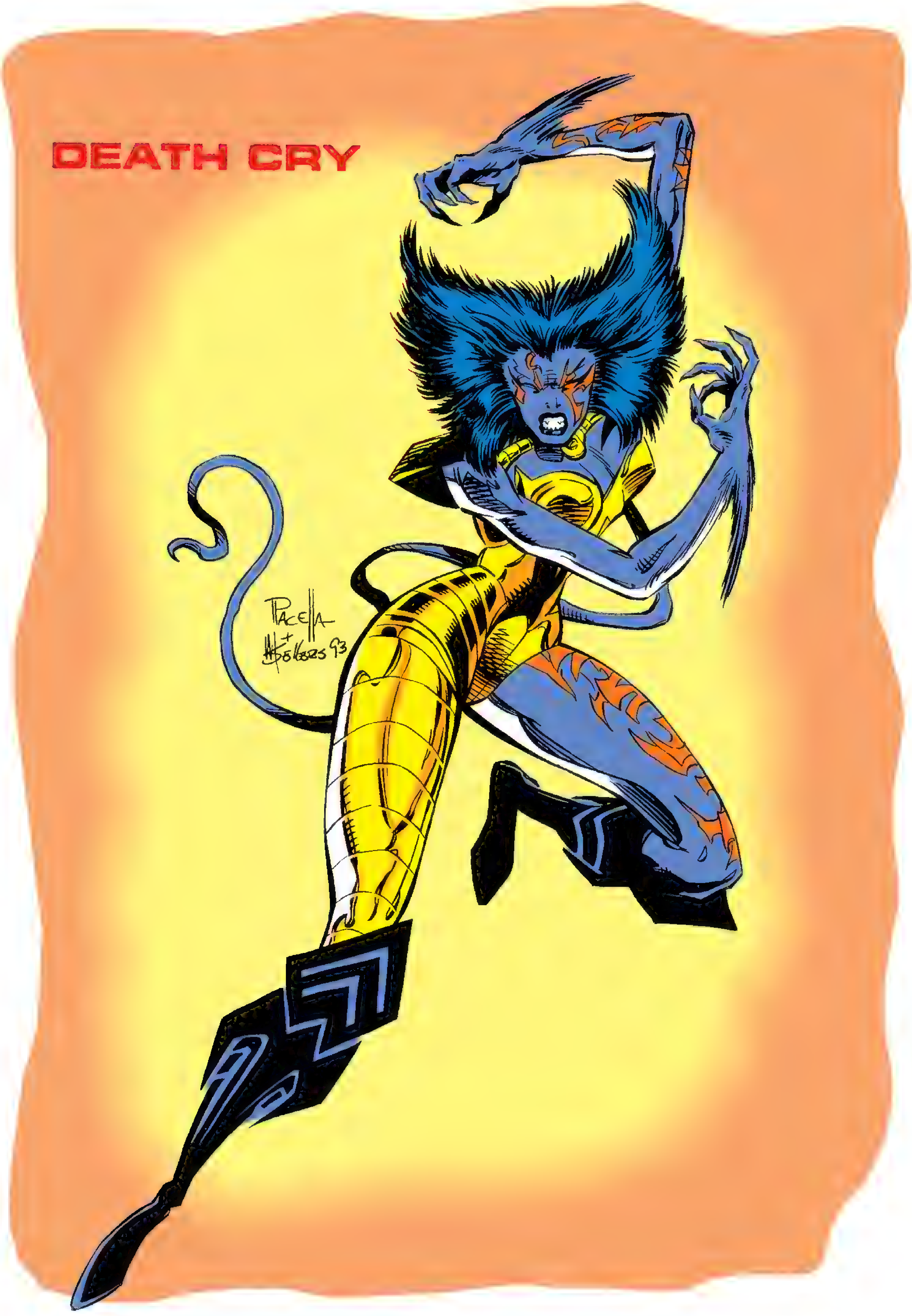

THE VISION


CRYSTAL
JEFF MOORE
M + Sellers 93

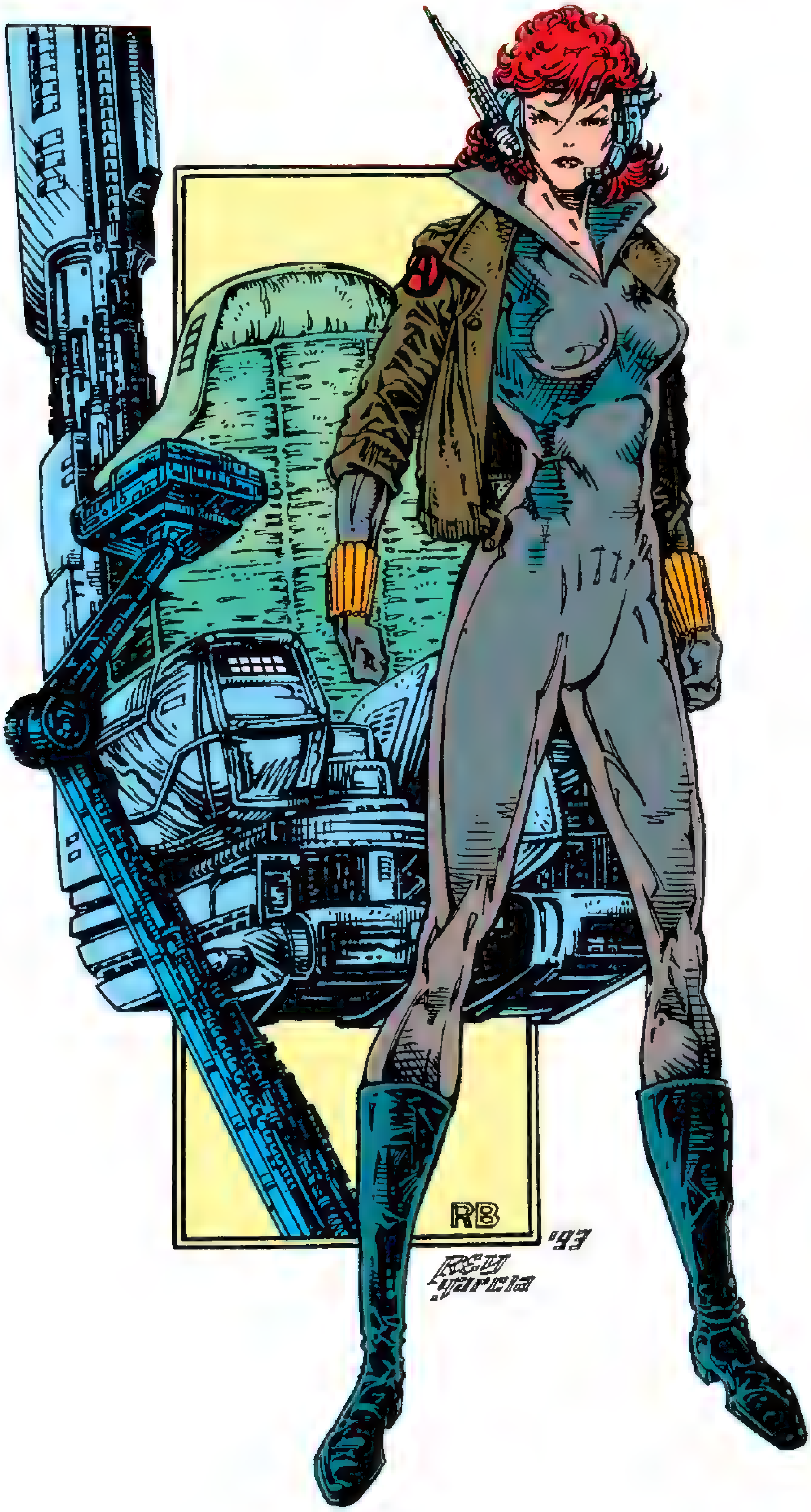
GIANT MAN

RB
REY
garcia
'93

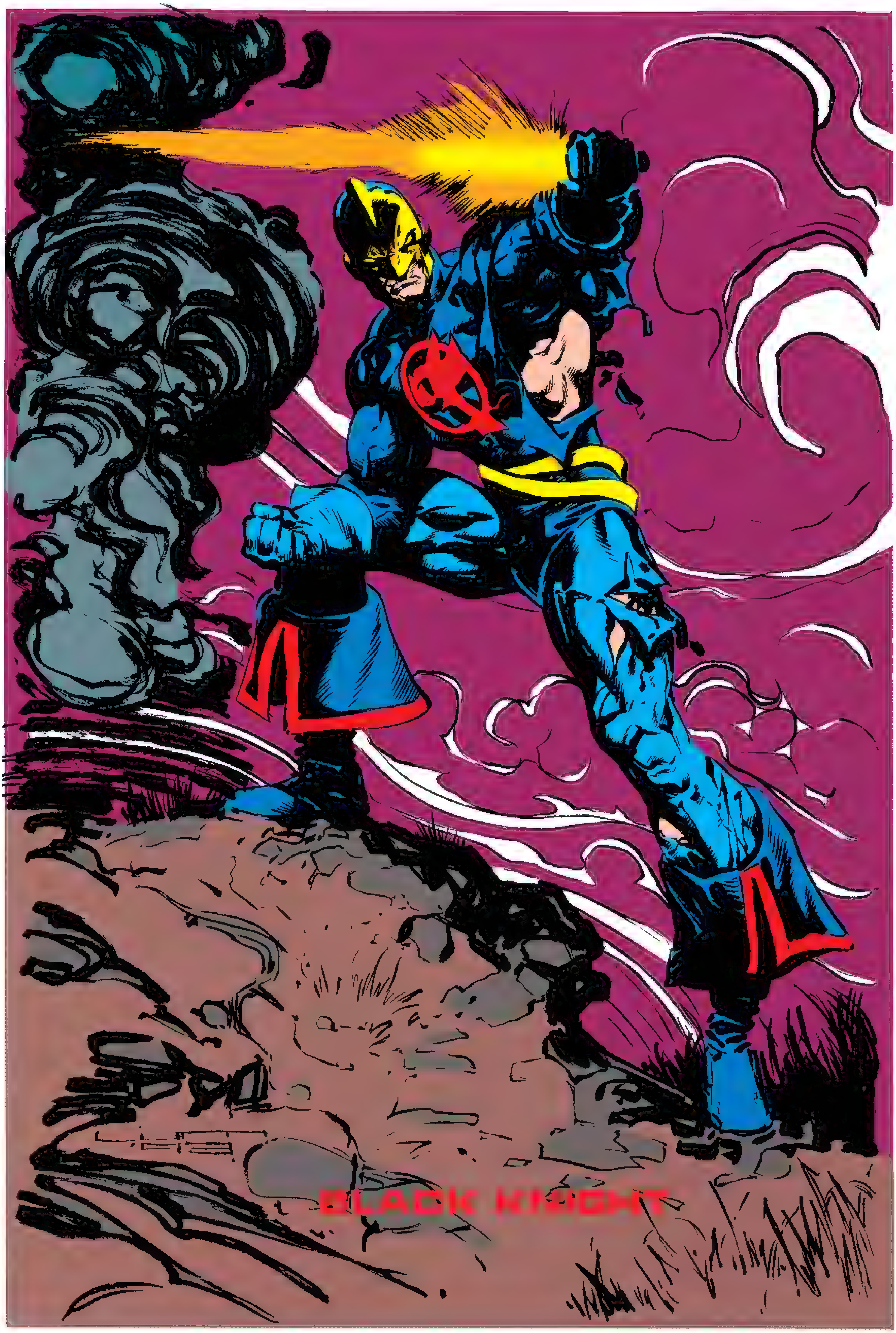
DEATH CRY

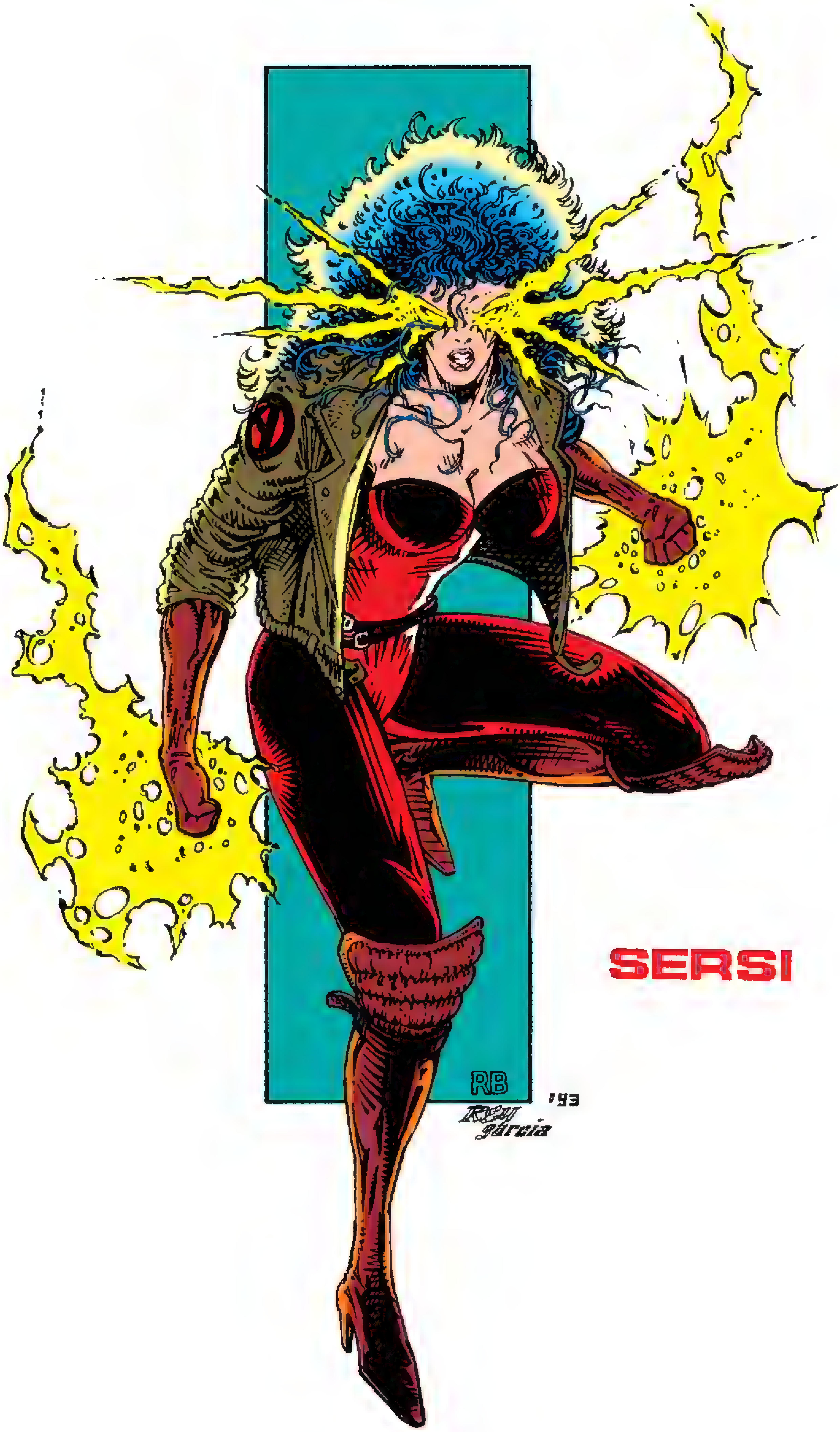

Pacella
+
Sellers 93

BLACK WIDOW

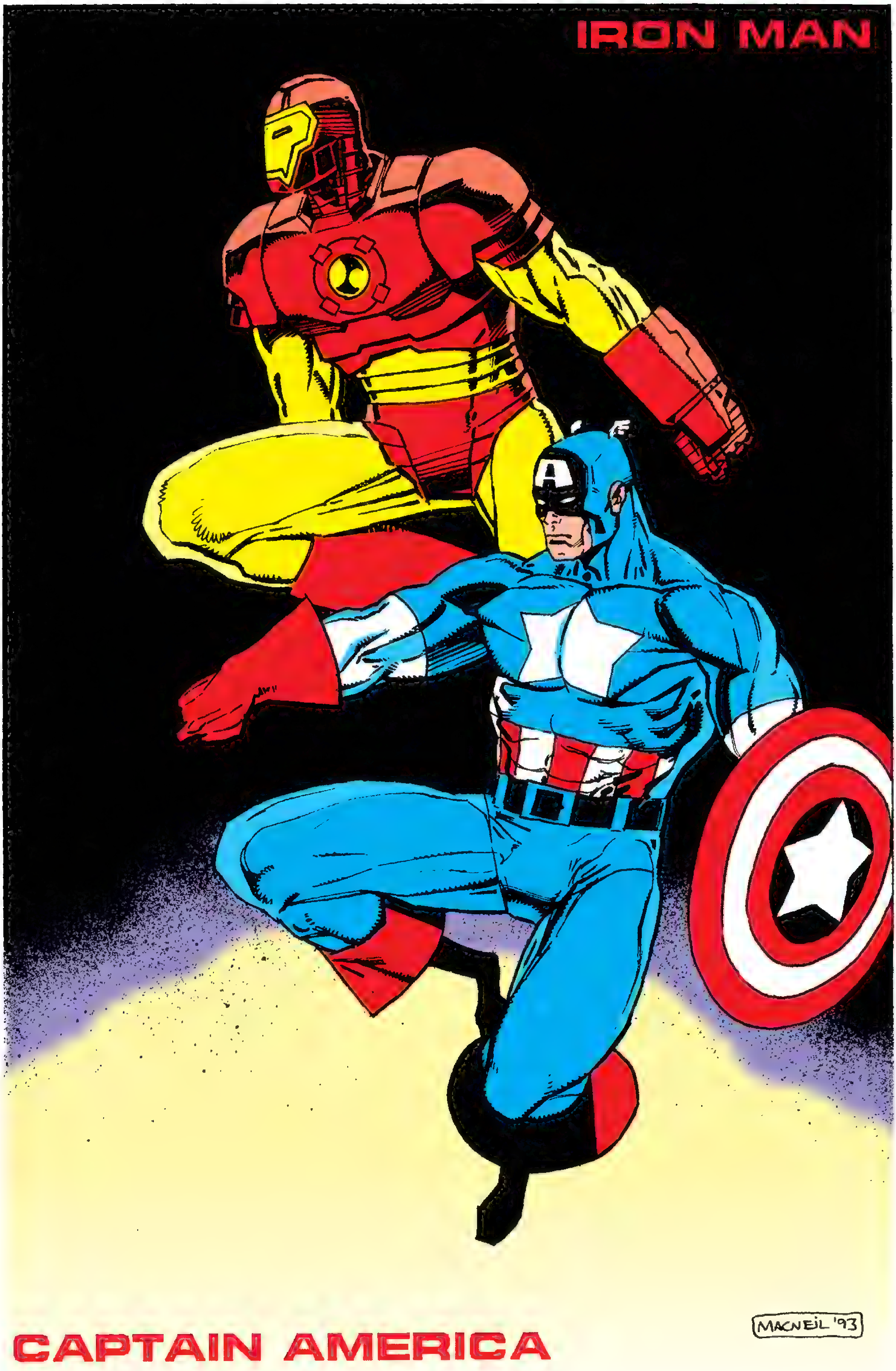

RB
'93
Ray Garcia

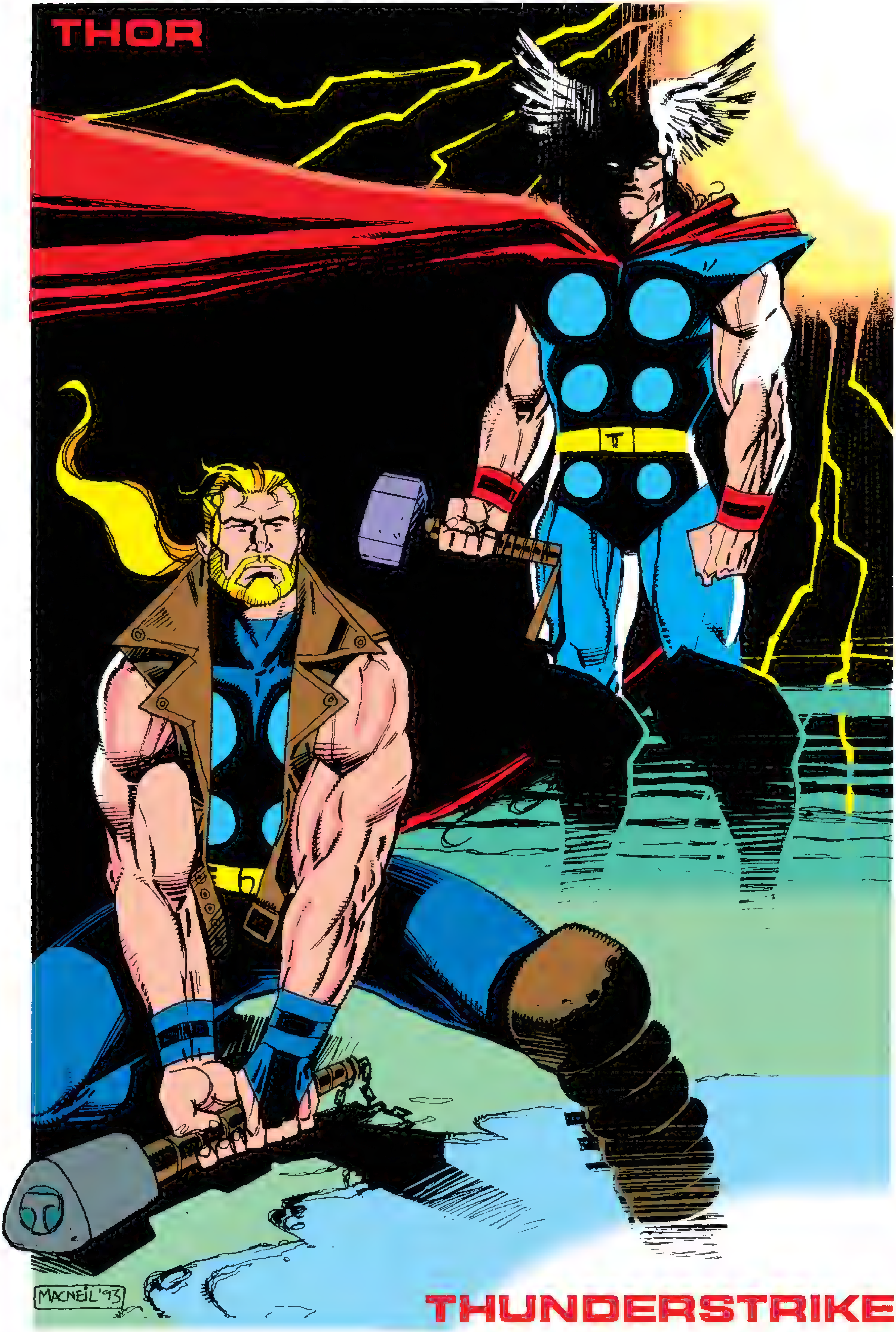
H
HERCULES

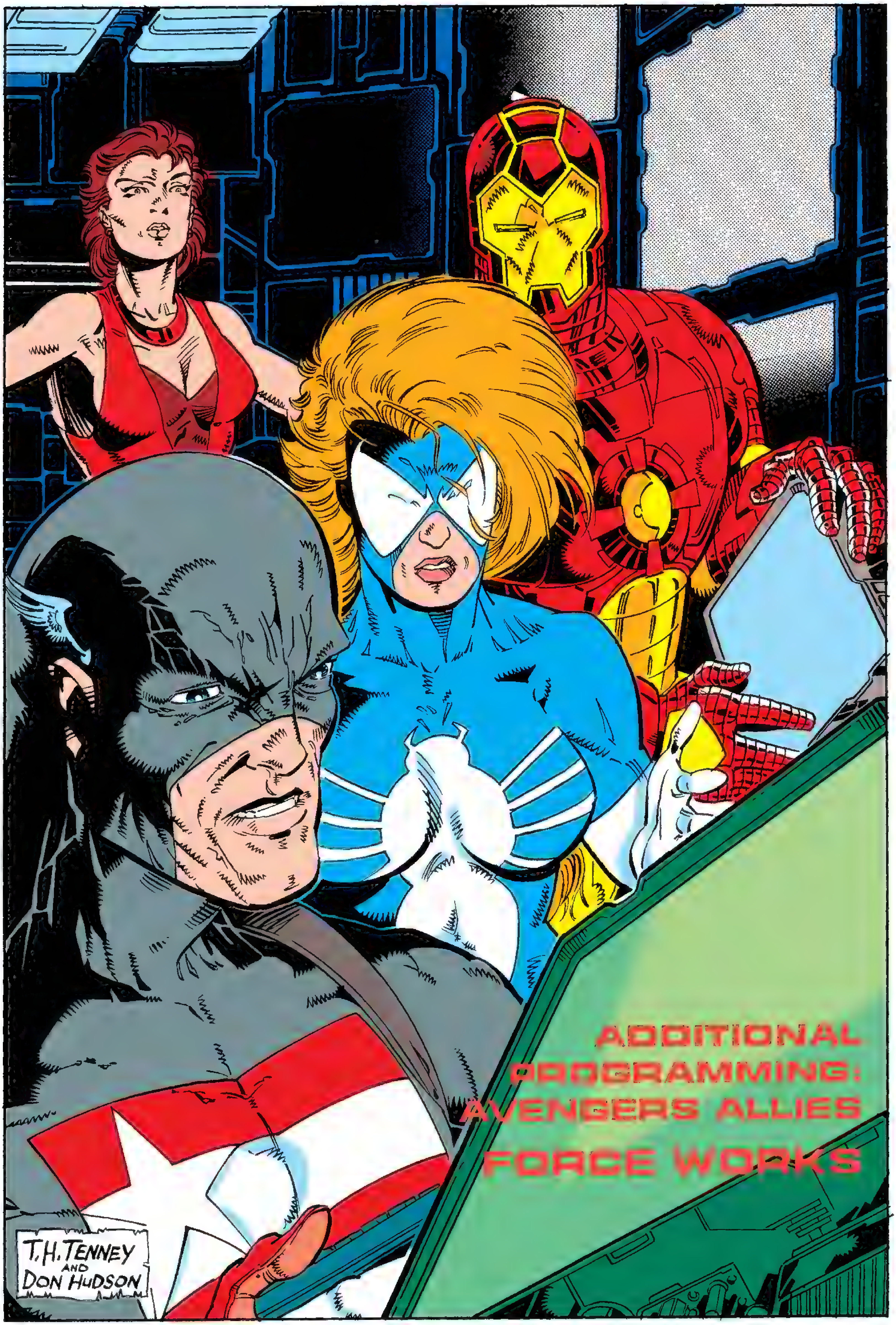

BLACK KNIGHT


RB
'93
Rey garcia

SERSI

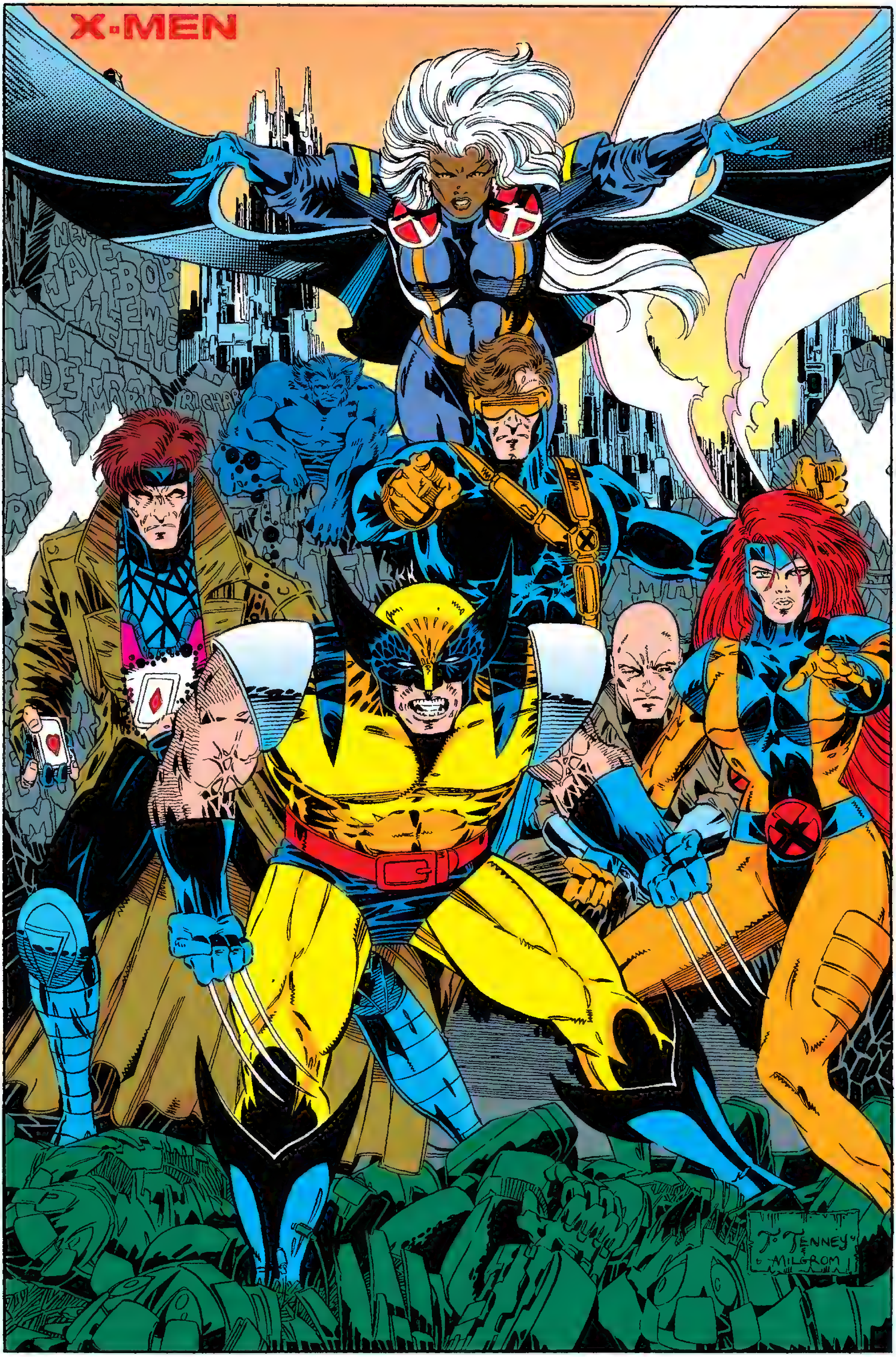

IRON MAN
CAPTAIN AMERICA
MACNEIL '93


THOR
MACNEIL '93
THUNDERSTRIKE


T.H. TENNEY
AND
DON HUDSON

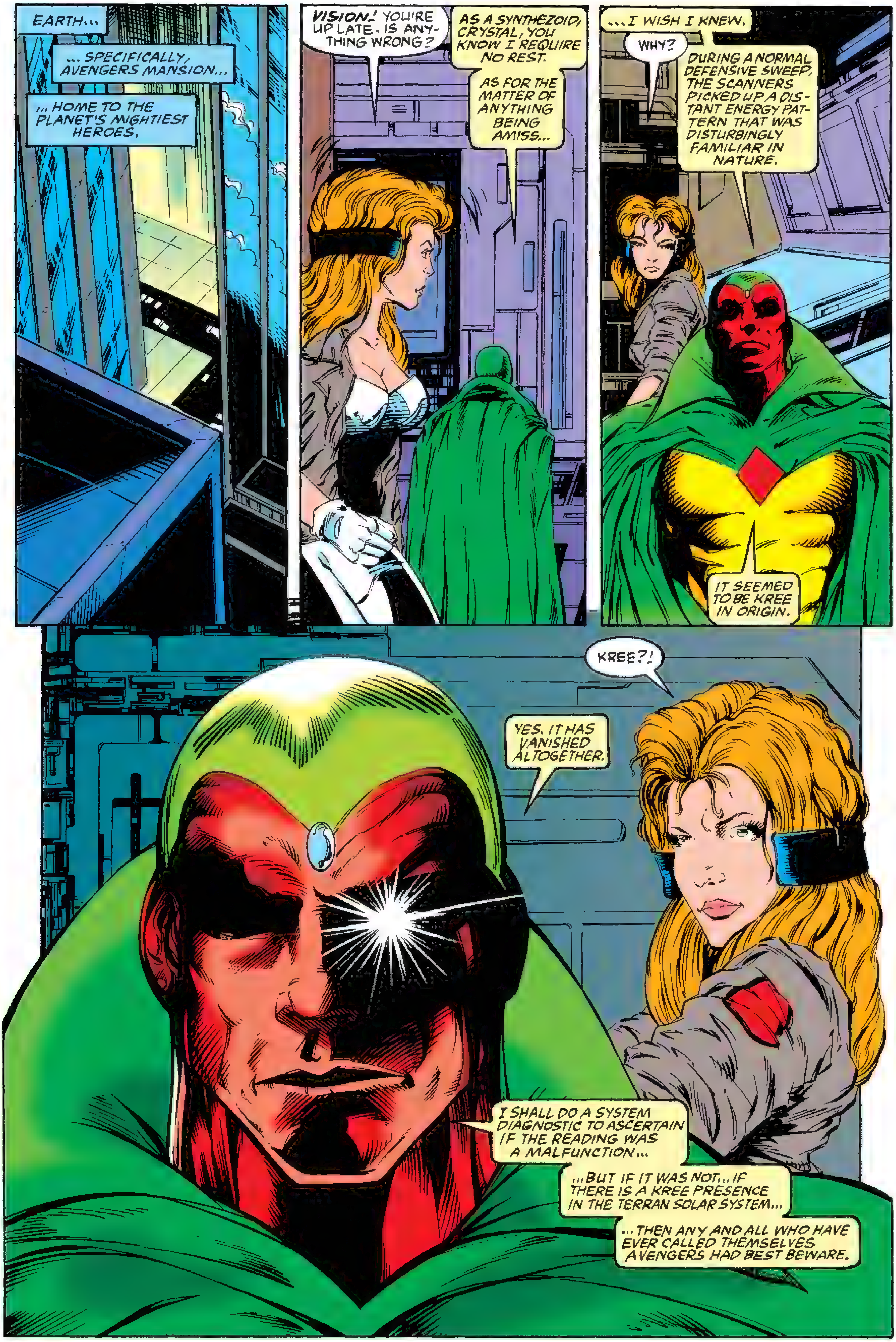
ADDITIONAL PROGRAMMING: AVENGERS ALLIES

FORCE WORKS


X-MEN
T. TENNEY
MILGROM

THE FANTASTIC FOUR
THE INHUMANS
RB REY '93 garcia

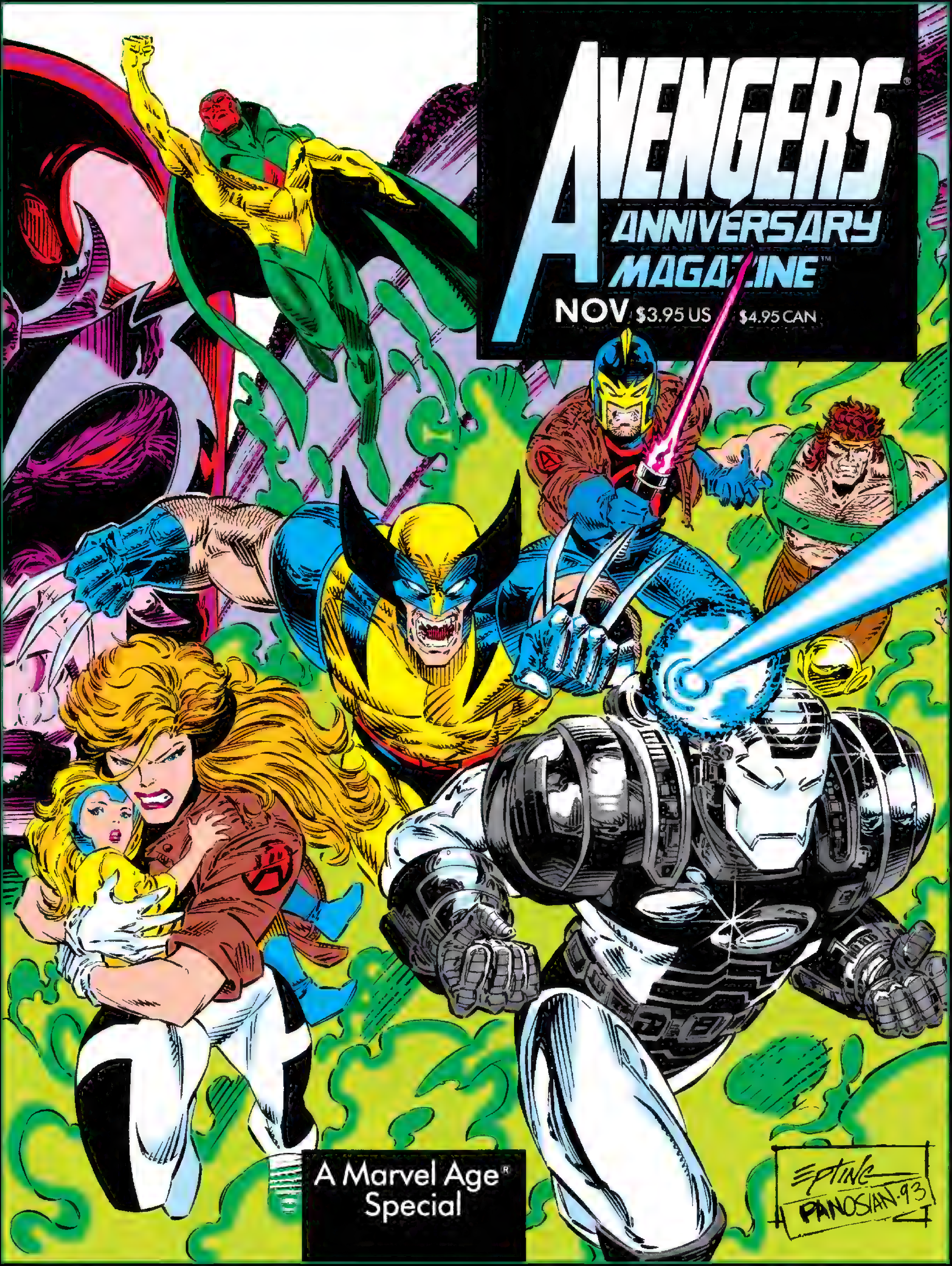
SHI'AR IMPERIAL GUARD
RB REY. garcia '93


EARTH...
...SPECIFICALLY, AVENGERS MANSION...
...HOME TO THE PLANET'S MIGHTIEST HEROES.
VISION! YOU'RE UP LATE. IS ANYTHING WRONG?
AS A SYNTHEZOID, CRYSTAL, YOU KNOW I REQUIRE NO REST.
AS FOR THE MATTER OF ANYTHING BEING AMISS...
...I WISH I KNEW.
WHY?
DURING A NORMAL DEFENSIVE SWEEP, THE SCANNERS PICKED UP A DISTANT ENERGY PATTERN THAT WAS DISTURBINGLY FAMILIAR IN NATURE.
IT SEEMED TO BE KREE IN ORIGIN.
KREE?!
YES. IT HAS VANISHED ALTOGETHER.
I SHALL DO A SYSTEM DIAGNOSTIC TO ASCERTAIN IF THE READING WAS A MALFUNCTION...
...BUT IF IT WAS NOT... IF THERE IS A KREE PRESENCE IN THE TERRAN SOLAR SYSTEM...
...THEN ANY AND ALL WHO HAVE EVER CALLED THEMSELVES AVENGERS HAD BEST BEWARE.

CHARACTER VISUALIZATIONS

ROBERT BROWN
ANDREW CURRIE
REY GARCIA
ANDY LANNING
AL MILGROM
JEFF MOORE
MIKE SELLERS
LIAM SHARPE
TOM TENNEY

COLORS BY
NEL YOMTOV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EPTING
PANOSIAN ·93

EDITORIAL

It blew my mind.

I had begun reading **THE AVENGERS** with issue #9 (by sheer coincidence, the same month I had begun reading **THE X-MEN** — with an Avengers guest shot). In #9, the team consisted of Iron Man, Captain America, Thor, Giant Man, and the Wasp fighting Zemo, the Executioner, the Enchantress, and the new (and ill-fated) powerhouse Wonder Man. The bad guys really didn't stand a chance. With a lineup like the Avengers had, it seemed as if there was no menace powerful enough to take them on! Even the Kang-engineered Spider-Man robot in issue #11 was no match for their might.

Then I picked up issue #16 and found that Stan and Jack had solved the power problem. They *replaced* just about the entire team! The Avengers lineup — Captain America, Quicksilver, Scarlet Witch, and Hawkeye — had become vastly less powerful. In the process, the level of dramatic tension had become vastly greater.

I was boggled. I was hooked. I haven't missed an issue since. And over the years, through the ups and the downs, through the epics and the inventory stories, **THE AVENGERS** has remained my favorite title.

I think it's the character interaction and the comraderie that have kept my attention the entire time. I was astonished that Hawkeye, still the hothead of the group, could be so bloody rude to Captain America. I was incensed, along with Hank (Goliath) Pym, at the racism of the Sons of the Serpent. I was impressed, along with Thor, at the sheer power exhibited by Iron Man in the assault on Michael's headquarters. And, like all readers, I found that when Captain America talks, everyone listens.

I won't claim that every **AVENGERS** issue has been a masterpiece. There have been stinkers. But I've always been confident that there were new masterpieces around the bend. And I must say that Bob Harras, Steve Epting and Tom Palmer have proved me right. Their current run on the **AVENGERS** is among the best I've ever read.

Why? The answer is mysteriously intangible. (If it weren't, every issue *would* have been a masterpiece.) It's just that the Harras/Epting/Palmer team seems to have tapped into the strange source of inspiration that has struck some of the best creative folks in comics throughout Avengers history.

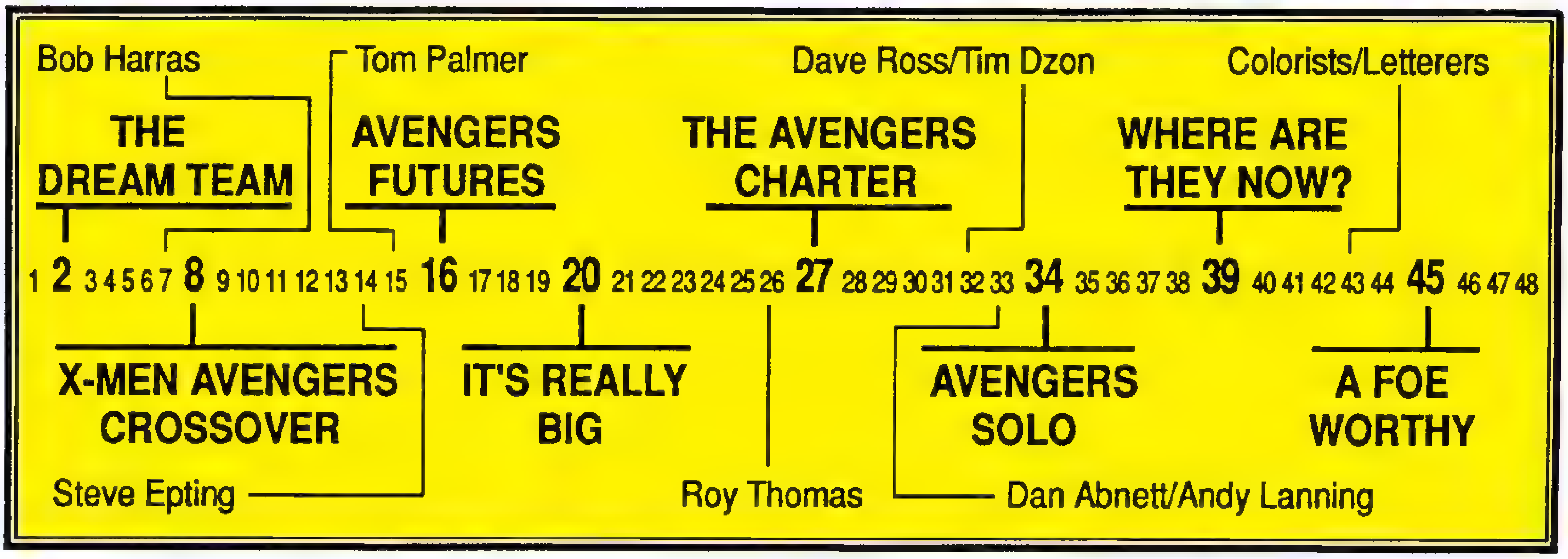
Ever the fact-seekers, those of us who put together this anniversary celebration have endeavored to ferret out the truth by examining many of the facets of the Avengers legend. What makes the Assemblers unique? How do those elements relate to the World's Mightiest Heroes today? Hopefully, we've answered some of the questions, and helped you, the reader, draw your own conclusions.

At the same time, we've looked at where that legend is going, in particular the ramifications that will shoot off from the Avengers/X-Men crossover, and from the catastrophic (and fatal) events unfolding helter skelter over in **AVENGERS WEST COAST**. The current and future creative teams seem fixed on the idea that there be no rest, no complacency in store for Avengers readers.

The goal seems to be that the first thirty years was just a warm-up. Fine by me.

—Steve Saffel
Editor, **MARVEL AGE**

THE AVENGERS
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
12¢ 37 IND FEB
"TO CONQUER A COLOSSUS!"


Bob Harras
Tom Palmer
Dave Ross/Tim Dzon
Colorists/Letterers
THE DREAM TEAM
AVENGERS FUTURES
THE AVENGERS CHARTER
WHERE ARE THEY NOW?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48
X-MEN AVENGERS CROSSOVER
IT'S REALLY BIG
AVENGERS SOLO
A FOE WORTHY
Steve Epting
Roy Thomas
Dan Abnett/Andy Lanning

THE DREAM TEAM

They're the best at what they do, and what they do is avenge.

Or is it?

The 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona showcased, for the first time, America's greatest basketball players. Larry Bird, Magic Johnson, Michael Jordan and nine others, the cream of both collegiate and professional level play, were joined together for a cause, to recapture America's Olympic gold in basketball. The rest of the world never stood a chance.

In 1963, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby brought together the elite of the Marvel Universe. Iron Man, The Incredible Hulk, Thor, Ant Man and the Wasp banded to stop the evil god of mischief, Loki. After the battle, these five, "Earth's Mightiest Heroes," joined for a cause — to defend the planet from threats too big for any individual member. Evil would never stand a chance.

The Avengers are one of Marvel's premier groups. Along with The Fantastic Four and The X-Men, the team spans three decades. Each group has faced numerous super-powered dangers, taken part in galactic confrontations, saved the planet many times and dealt with its own inner turmoil. Yet the Avengers are different. They seem to have a "mystique," as the book's editor Ralph Macchio put it, that pervades the group and its members, and affects the entire Marvel Universe.

What is this mystique, this unique group dynamic?

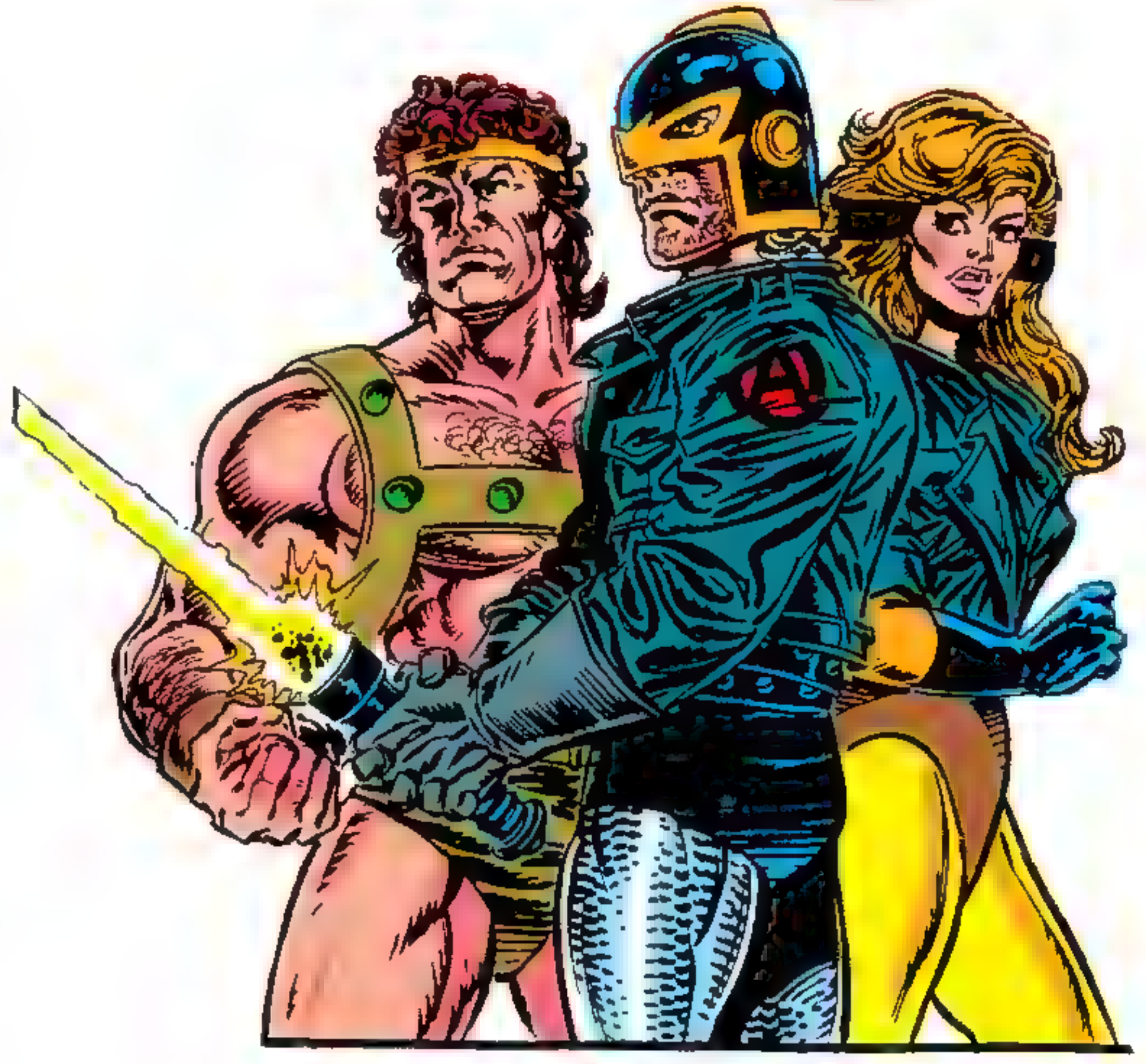
JE NE SAIS QUOI

"The Fantastic Four are a family who are adventure hobbyists and celebrities," Mark Gruenwald, executive editor of Marvel, pointed out. "On missions, each member is expected to do his or her part, but they never work out on maneuvers in their free time. They do it for the love of it." Ralph likened the group to DC's Challengers of the Unknown.

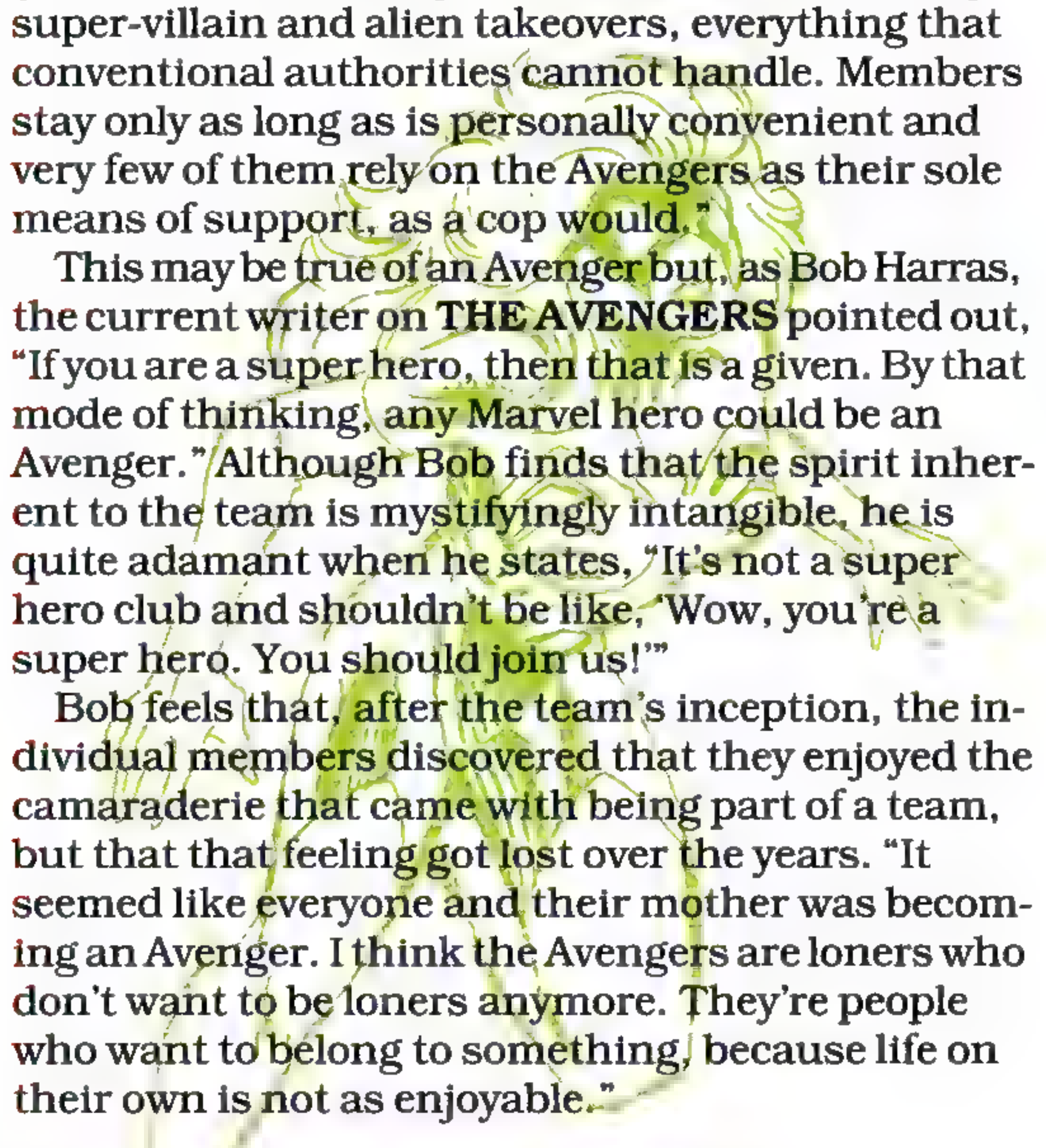
"The X-Men are a common cause group, activists to help their own kind," Mark continued. "They have felt the sting of bigotry and prejudice directed toward them because they are mutants. They are always persecuted, so they must work out constantly in the Danger Room. Thus, staying together is a matter of survival for them.

"The Avengers fall somewhere in between."

The policy of allowing member to come and go as they please is unique to the Avengers. No other team in the Marvel Universe operates in this manner. Yet, this characteristic in and of itself might mistakenly suggest that they are simply a group of heroes, any heroes, who happen to use the banner, "Avengers." But there is more than meets the eye.



Mark Gruenwald emphasizes that they were Marvel's only governmentally sanctioned super hero team for more than two decades before the emergence of Freedom Force and, quite recently, X-Factor. They also have a charter, their own set of self-governing rules and procedures uniquely their own. Mark hinted at the existence of an operations manual, which would explain the standards of procedure during combat situations, although "they (The Avengers) probably do not give basic training or tests on that manual. Individual members work out, but there is no obligation. The Avengers are all trained, seasoned professionals who know enough how to do it on their own.



"The Avengers is a constantly changing organization," Mark continued. "All its members have a sincere respect for and dedication to 'standard good guy stuff,' i.e. making the world safe, preventing super-villain and alien takeovers, everything that conventional authorities cannot handle. Members stay only as long as is personally convenient and very few of them rely on the Avengers as their sole means of support, as a cop would."

This may be true of an Avenger but, as Bob Harras, the current writer on **THE AVENGERS** pointed out, "If you are a super hero, then that is a given. By that mode of thinking, any Marvel hero could be an Avenger." Although Bob finds that the spirit inherent to the team is mystifyingly intangible, he is quite adamant when he states, "It's not a super hero club and shouldn't be like, 'Wow, you're a super hero. You should join us!'"

Bob feels that, after the team's inception, the individual members discovered that they enjoyed the camaraderie that came with being part of a team, but that that feeling got lost over the years. "It seemed like everyone and their mother was becoming an Avenger. I think the Avengers are loners who don't want to be loners anymore. They're people who want to belong to something, because life on their own is not as enjoyable."

"DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT IT."

Mark pointed out the reputation of the group as another driving force for heroes to want to be a part of the Avengers. "They are the only public group in the Marvel Universe and world renowned as Earth's first line of defense, the 'go to' guys," he explained. "Thus, 'Avenger' has become synonymous with respect. Anyone joining wants some of that status to rub off. It's like you'd want to be a Green Beret if you were a soldier, because they have special clout, a big bad reputation, and status among regular militia." Yet, given the nature of the team, Mark could not understand the public's positive reaction. "It seems odd that the public has such confidence and respect when they never know who is going to pick up the phone when they dial the Avengers. And yet, there is something about the very name of 'Avengers,' that Joe Q. Public knows whoever's going to be sent out on this emergency, even if they have only the powers of the Wasp, they're going to get a certain professional caliber and the job will get done."

This reverence carries over to other super-powered heroes and teams as well. Even Reed Richards of the Fantastic Four has deferred to Captain America. "Most heroes would respect the Avengers just for being Avengers," Mark explained, "unless they are of a cocky egotistical nature like, 'Sure, I could have gone the Avengers' route and gotten their status, but I don't need their reputation or Quinjets or Avengers' ID card to do good.'"

Mark likened these instances to the ideology behind becoming an independent movie company, as opposed to a major motion picture studio. There are some independent film producers who would love to get a deal with Paramount or Universal. Otherwise, doing films for smaller companies like Miramax is just fine. These smaller companies thumb their noses at the larger studios in defiance, citing that they do not need the big bucks and clout to make good movies.

What these heroes do not realize is that their negative reaction further feeds the "mystique" that is the Avengers. "Anyone worth thumbing your nose at is a major player," Mark agreed.

He also compared the status of the Avengers West Coast to that of the East Coast team the way the entertainment profession would compare Los Angeles to Broadway. "There is probably as much status given to be an Avengers West Coaster, if you live in the Western part of the country, as an Eastern part of the country resident would give the New York team," he explained. "Some people feel that acting on Broadway gains the most respect in the acting profession, while others tend to think that doing movies in Los Angeles is where it's at. Both sides have things to offer, but either way you are on the top of the heap."

No other team in the Marvel Universe is sanctioned by the U.S. Government and thus expected to react when called upon. For that matter, there isn't another team who has a twenty-four hour monitoring system manned at all times by a member to field emergency calls. The Fantastic Four have a secretary, and an android one at that, but only because Four Freedoms Plaza's main duty is to house Reed's research and he makes himself somewhat available to other scientists.

Therefore, it is no wonder that when the Avengers arrive upon the scene of a problem, they expect total cooperation from all those around them, including any super hero types who may have been there first. One can only wonder whether this attitude denotes a degree of snobbery on the group's part, but Mark disagrees. He insists that deference to the team is not demanded by its members, but battle experience tells the Avengers that they should be the ones in charge. "It's like a Jack Nicholson or Marlon Brando walking onto the set of a movie. As an actor, you would feel their presence immediately and the atmosphere in the room would change. You would automatically find yourself saying, 'What do you think, Mr. Brando?'" New scribe on **AVENGERS WEST COAST** and the all new **FORCE WORKS** titles, Andy Lanning agreed with Mark's analogy. "There should be a certain amount of awe with the person meeting them," he said.

Also, the very appearance of the Avengers on the scene instantly indicates that this emergency is of cataclysmic proportions, an event big enough that the Avengers must be called in to handle it. "The Avengers tend to get into 'big deal' things, not just what they happen to stumble upon like other groups," Mark explained. "They are sent for as specialists, the 'super hero's super hero.' Everyone in the group, at least according to the public, makes the cut and is worth being on this team."

CECIL B. DE MILLE

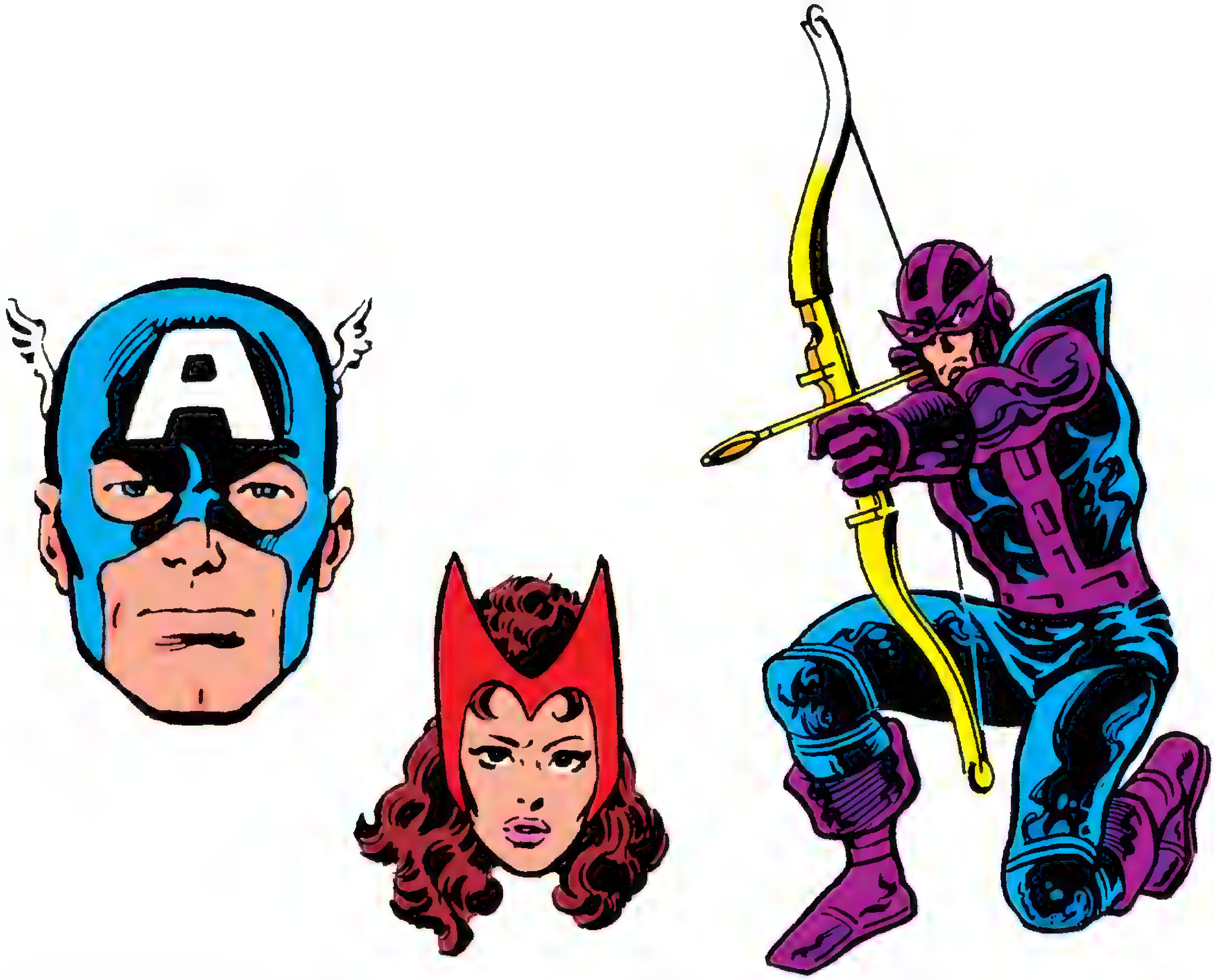
These dynamics make the storylines in the **AVENGERS** more grand in scope. As Ralph Macchio put it, "There is nothing that happens within the pages of the **AVENGERS** that does not affect the rest of the Marvel Universe, that isn't of grave importance. Everyone knows someone who is an Avenger or a reserve member." To Andy Lanning, while he was growing up, the **AVENGERS** "stood for great heroic action that you could lose yourself in and come out feeling 'that was an awesome read.'"

"Thirty years of history only creates further excitement in the future," Bob Harras commented. "Most of Marvel's books have thirty years behind them. There are soap operas as old, but people still watch them because they care about the characters and are familiar with them. If you go into the minutia of the history and say, 'Well, in 1962, Kurgo from Planet X said thus to Reed Richards and we have to do a story on that,' then you get bogged down. The secret is to give the historical aspects a twist and allow them to grow."

"What Bob has done, [drawing from his experience as] the **X-MEN** editor," Ralph Macchio added, "is taken what is contemporary and what is really popular today, without losing the classical element that is the stabilizing pillar of the **AVENGERS.**"

The potential for another Kree/Skrull War, Nefaria Trilogy, Korvac Saga, or, most recently, Galactic Storm, is always prevalent within the pages of the **AVENGERS**. "With Spider-Man, the stories are more streetwise," Bob Harras observed. "You can have smaller scope stories with individual members of the group but otherwise it would be drastic overkill, like Thor taking on a mugger." Or, as Andy Lanning added: "Like taking an elephant gun to hunt a mouse."

If the storylines in the **AVENGERS** tend toward the epic, then the art has to reflect that. Comic book greats such as Don Heck, John Buscema, George Perez and John Byrne have all brought their powerful style to the book within its thirty year history. "The **AVENGERS** has always meant beautiful draftsmanship. . .with an emphasis on the characters," Ralph Macchio remarked. "Steve Epting and



Tom Palmer, the current creative team, have established a nineties feel for the book while also harkening back to the power and grandeur of the John Buscema/Tom Palmer era."

"The look has to be big without being too high-tech," he continued. "**X-Men** is more high-tech because the characters and the complexity of the costumes is different. The larger scope of the **AVENGERS** does not need such a complex look. Less is more. A more technical style of artwork would take away from the character interaction that the **AVENGERS** is known for."

"LIONS AND TIGERS AND BEARS, OH MY!"

The unique dynamic of a rotating roster offers endless opportunity for interesting character match-ups. Given the circumstances, past members can always appear for a particular adventure and shake up whatever ambience has been established by the current members. The current team roster is a perfect example. There is a demigod, an Inhuman, an Eternal, a former Russian espionage agent, a medieval knight and an android. "Here you have a kind of subspecies of humanity, an incredible variety of type," Ralph revealed. "This creates a group dynamic you do not get anywhere else.

Both the Fantastic Four and X-Men are limited in that they are bound to a particular group structure. In the former it is a familial relationship, while in the latter it is the onus of being a mutant. The stabilizing factor in the **AVENGERS** is the charter which serves as the parameter in which the group functions, an outer-structure as opposed to the infrastructure of the FF and X-Men.

"Because they aren't stuck together with a common bond," Ralph Macchio explained, "the characters interact in ways that other teams do not. There is a great deal of opportunity for romance, intra-group problems, and relationships. The new roster has created the possibility of a love triangle among Sersi, Dane Whitman — the Black Knight, and Crystal. And Crystal is married."

Thus, internal situations bound by the Avengers Charter give the team a personality as Mark Gruenwald explained. "The difference between the way the team is supposed to work on paper, ideally in its by-laws, and the way it actually works in the field in situations, with its personality conflicts, makes the Avengers almost a character in and of themselves. In other group books," he continued, "you do not have the group as a character. You have a bunch of individuals who you like or don't like."

Mark compared the Avengers with singular heroes such as Spider-Man and Daredevil. These characters are constantly dealing with their individual ideals of justice and what each of them can actually achieve given their physical and emotional limitations. Since the Avengers are rarely limited in the "physical limitations" aspect, their psychological structure is the foil which struggles against the team's parameters.

Bob Harras cited the team's ideology as one of its most compelling characteristics, and one that may explain the respect and "mystique" the group holds over the rest of the Marvel Universe. "The Charter, which in essence is a physical indication of the team's ideals, insists on the use of restraint. Here we have 'Earth's Mightiest Heroes' and they are bound by their own laws to use minimal 'might.' Trying to stop a situation and figuring out a way to do so, while keeping your morality intact, makes any character or team more interesting."

AGAINST THE GRAIN

The rules of the team were sorely pressed recently during the "Galactic Storm" storyline. The decision to kill the Supreme Intelligence created a rift between the Avengers and their West Coast counterpart. Although, as Bob pointed out, "for the first time in the team's history, they actually 'avenged' something," the Charter stresses a "no-kill clause."

"The ramifications of that storyline will have a profound effect on the future of the Avengers," **AVENGERS WEST COAST** Editor Nel Yomtov noted. "The foundations of the Avengers were shaken and what it means to be an Avenger was brought under very close examination."

The conflict between the bi-coastal Avengers will result in the West Coasters forsaking the Charter and their name. No longer will they be, as Andy Lanning put it, "a glorified super hero version of the United Nations. They will be more high profile and take a hands-on approach to saving the world, sort of like the difference between the UN's involvement in Ethiopia and Live Aid."

Angrily breaking all ties with their former mates, this new team, **FORCE WORKS,** will have a monitoring system, only it will be used in a preemptive fashion, utilizing the Scarlet Witch's probability hex power to pinpoint hot spots. Andy compared the process to the Chaos Theory in physical science, which states that any given equation will fall apart when put under today's computer scrutiny. In other words, even Einstein's Theory of Relativity is wrong when a computer is allowed to compute the equation to the billionth decimal point. Thus, the new team will be pro-active, arriving at emergencies *before* they happen, unlike the Avengers' reactive approach.

Yet, this tactic is an anathema to the spiritual beliefs of the Avengers. "Great power has great responsibility, but what is the definition of responsibility?" Bob Harras asked. "It's similar to that age-old question, 'If you knew Hitler, as a baby, was going to be Hitler, would you have killed him?' The Avengers could go back in time and take care of these things, so why don't they? They are kept in check by their high moral fiber."

The interaction of every manner of life and non-life, held together by expectations higher than any one member and stronger than any internal strife. Earth's first line of defense, the only "go to" guys in the Marvel Universe. The Avengers.

Like Peter Parker, Stephen Vrattos is a member of the journalistic community. Through his regular work on MARVEL AGE and the various magazine specials, including MARVEL PREVIEW '93 and the X-MEN ANNIVERSARY MAGAZINE, he has honed his writing skills by covering the broadest possible spectrum of Marvel-related topics.

Bob Harras

PRO FILES

— Steve Behling

"What I knew was what I didn't want to do. What I didn't want to do was have a normal job, which I kept telling my parents, which terrified them." Such was **AVENGERS** writer Bob Harras's state of mind when he applied for a job at Marvel in 1982.

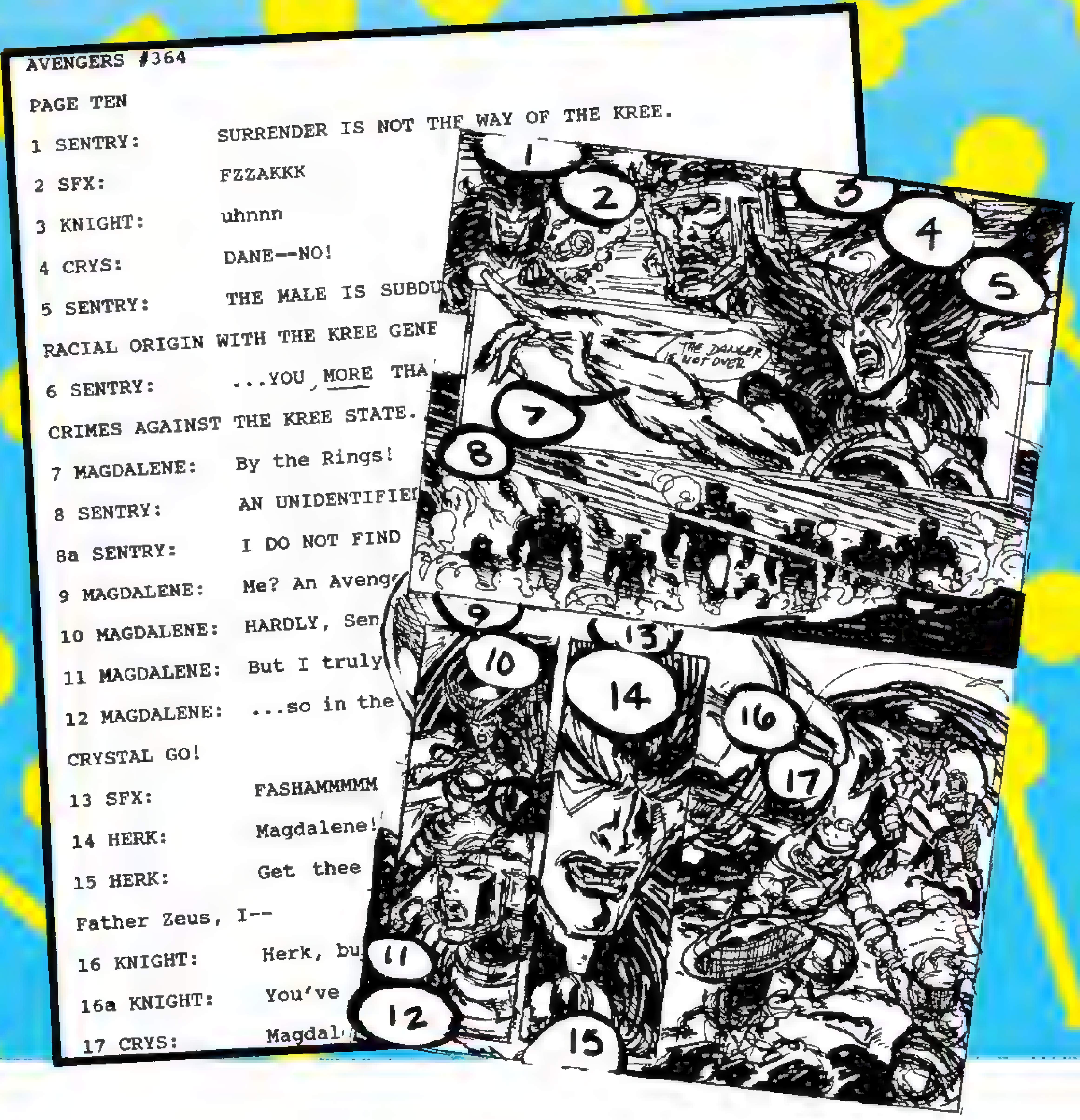
Upon graduating from **SUNY Stonybrook** ("The fine State University of New York," as Harras referred to it) with majors in English and American History, Harras applied for — and nearly accepted — a position with a major book publisher in New York City. As a last minute hedge against having that "normal job," he filled out an application at Marvel. He was called back the next day for an interview, and became then Editor-in-Chief Jim Shooter's assistant. Within two months he became current **AVENGERS'** Editor Ralph Macchio's assistant, then a managing editor for Bob Budiansky. When Editor Ann Nocenti left her position, he was offered the editorial reins of a certain group of super-powered mutants that monopolize a particular letter of the alphabet.

As to how he came to write the **AVENGERS**, Harras jokingly related that he was asked to help out with the writing chores "because the book was going bi-weekly. . . You know, it was only a temporary thing, because I wasn't intending to do the book on a regular basis," he said. No one ever said, "'Okay, here's the **AVENGERS**, it's yours.' It was more like, 'Do me a favor, handle it for a couple of months.' I'm still wondering when it's going to end," he added, laughing.

As the permanent writer, he has sought to make the **AVENGERS** truly a team in every sense of the word. "I think [for] a team book to be really successful, [it] has to be like a family. And if they're a bunch of characters who are just set together, because they have their own titles. . .[then] it's a team-up book, as opposed to a team book," Harras explained. His philosophy is to take characters that the reader will, for the most part, only find in the **AVENGERS**, and exploit them to their full potential. "To do a really good **AVENGERS** story," he said, explaining this philosophy, "you get a group of people. . .you see them only in the **AVENGERS**, you get to know them really well."

Part of the challenge in doing a team book, then, is to allow the perhaps lesser known characters to shine through, rather than putting more "commercial" characters within the fabric of the **AVENGERS** team. Harras stated a preference to choose characters who would "form romantic triangles. . .friendships . . .rivalries. . .because that's what made the **AVENGERS** really, really strong in the beginning. . .when the second shift came in (**AVENGERS #16**), Scarlet Witch, Hawkeye, that's when it got really interesting to me." He then chuckled, adding quickly, "I wasn't around when that happened, because I'm much too young to have been there."

Harras looks forward to bringing new cast members into the **AVENGERS** family in the months ahead, and crafting stories to revolve even more around those characters — "rather than. . .'oh my God, they're fighting Galactus's evil brother this month,'" as he stated with a laugh. He has a vision of the direction in which he wants to take the book, but no blueprints set in concrete. "My way is much more chaotic, you know, but I kind of like that. That way no one can pin me down!"



AVENGERS #364

PAGE TEN

1 SENTRY: SURRENDER IS NOT THE WAY OF THE KREE.

2 SFX: FZZAKKK

3 KNIGHT: uhnnn

4 CRYS: DANE--NO!

5 SENTRY: THE MALE IS SUBDU

RACIAL ORIGIN WITH THE KREE GENE

6 SENTRY: ...YOU MORE THA

CRIMES AGAINST THE KREE STATE.

7 MAGDALENE: By the Rings!

8 SENTRY: AN UNIDENTIFIE

8a SENTRY: I DO NOT FIND

9 MAGDALENE: Me? An Aveng

10 MAGDALENE: HARDLY, Sen

11 MAGDALENE: But I truly

12 MAGDALENE: ...so in the

CRYSTAL GO!

13 SFX: FASHAMMMMM

14 HERK: Magdalene!

15 HERK: Get thee

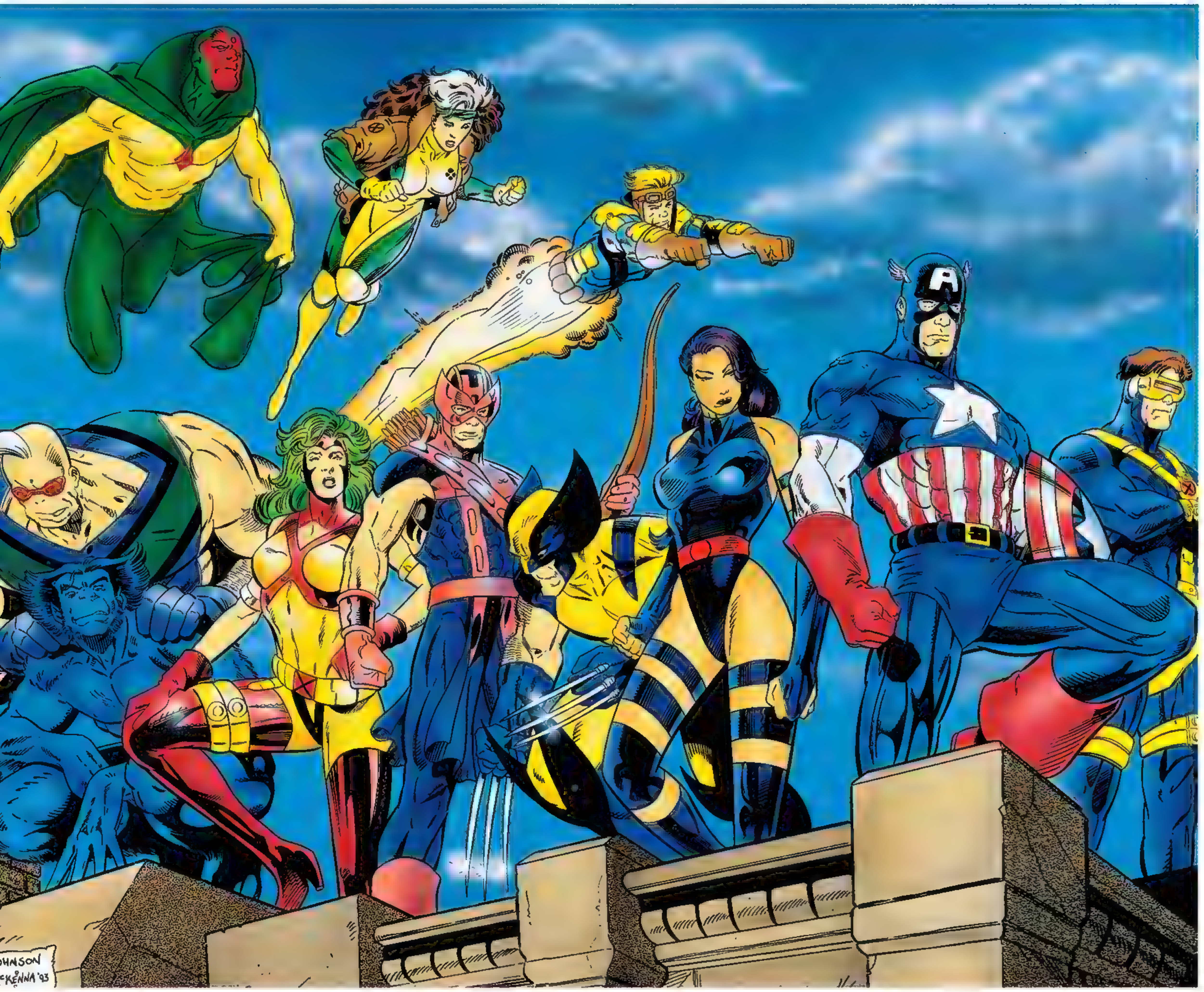
Father Zeus, I--

16 KNIGHT: Herk, bu

16a KNIGHT: You've

17 CRYS: Magdal

THE MAKING OF THE AVENGERS / X-MEN CROSSOVER



It started small — just the kidnapping of a baby.

Then a red angel appeared (see **X-FACTOR #92**), inviting mutants to come with him to "heaven," but only if they wanted to go.

Then there was that little matter of a major genocidal war breaking out in Genosha. . .

Last January, **AVENGERS** writer/**X-MEN** Editor Bob Harras, and **X-MEN** writer Fabian Nicieza decided that Quicksilver, Crystal, and Scarlet Witch would face their "Blood Ties" with Magneto in this fall's X-Men/Avengers crossover. **UNCANNY X-MEN** writer Scott Lobdell wanted to up the stakes by blowing the conflict in Genosha sky-high. During the four months of tossing ideas back and forth, the editorial and writing teams created Exodus, a brand new super powerful villain worthy of both teams, and finally felt they had laid the appropriate groundwork necessary for the epic.

In the words of **UNCANNY X-MEN** writer Scott Lobdell, "Exodus is the next big thing; Magneto for the '90s. This isn't your father's **X-MEN**."

Nor your father's **AVENGERS**. Not only will this Avengers/X-Men crossover be unique in that it will find them not fighting against each other, but side-by-side, but by the time the action is over, the East Coast Avengers will be re-evaluating their team's very foundations, and the West Coast members will be questioning their allegiance to their East Coast teammates. In sum, the fallout for all teams promises to be much more than 30th anniversary fanfare and fireworks; according to the creative teams, it should be nothing short of *nuclear meltdown*.

"I think that what we were lacking earlier, we are definitely *not* lacking now," Nicieza said confidently. "The outline I did originally was based almost entirely on family. That's what the X-Men books are about, but that's not necessarily what the Avengers books are about. The story we have now is completely about family, but it's also completely about excessive use of power in a very volatile international situation. It has a lot of human interest and will have a lot of wide, sweeping consequences."

AVENGERS Editor Ralph Macchio agreed. "I definitely believe that the fact that this crossover has gone through several evolutions is indicative of the fact that we're really trying to perfect it," he said. "I think we've got something more than worthy of being the 30th anniversary issue. All the meetings and mental strain are really going to pay off."

The five-issue storyline will take off in **AVENGERS #368**, run through **X-MEN #26**, regular-sized **AVENGERS WEST COAST #101**, **UNCANNY X-MEN #307**, and conclude in a double-sized AVENGERS **#369**. As for that **AVENGERS WEST COAST** issue, it is one number shy of the termination of the series and the launch of the team members' new title, **FORCE WORKS**, which will be written by Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning (**PUNISHER**, Marvel UK), and penciled by Marvel newcomer Thomas Tenny.

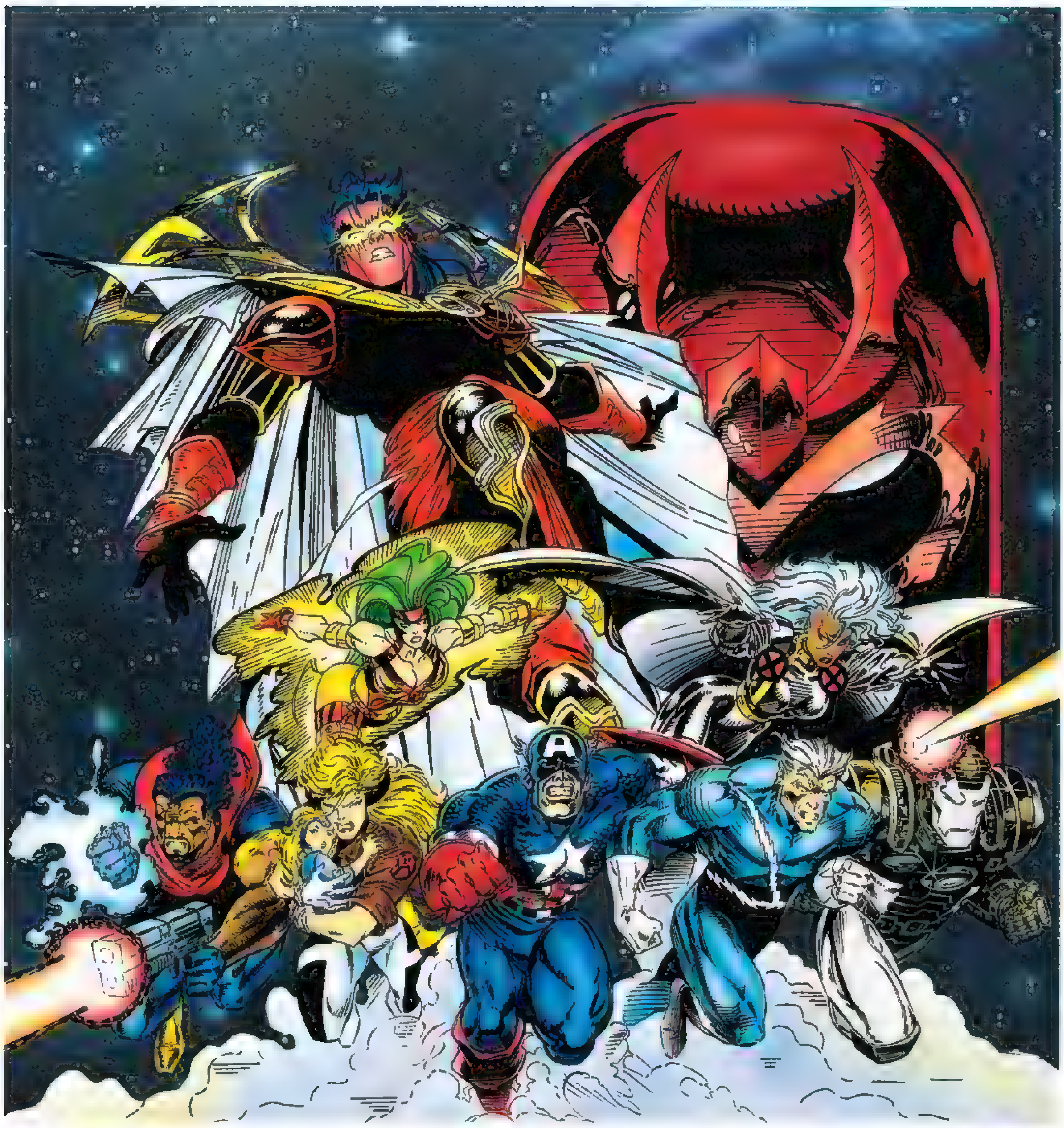
HUMAN TNT

To ignite the fuse, the baby to be kidnapped is Luna, Crystal's and Quicksilver's human child. The kidnapper, fallen Acolyte Fabian Cortez, needs a bargaining chip with Luna's grandad Magneto, who's very, very mad at Cortez for a little matter of attempted murder (**X-MEN #3**).

The red angel — no angel at all, but the aforementioned Exodus — turns out to be Magneto's most faithful acolyte. Heaven is, or would be, Avalon, once Graymalkin, Cable's satellite home, now Magneto's orbiting mutant paradise, rebuilt stronger than ever.

Paradoxically, Magneto won't be directly involved in the action at all, as was originally planned. He won't be quite himself following **X-MEN #25**.

Still, just because Magneto isn't a player, no one



should rest easy. Indeed, since Exodus promotes the cause, but lacks Magneto's life experiences, this acolyte may be even more dangerous than the Master of Magnetism, Lobdell offered, obviously excited about taking his crack at the character. "You can think of Exodus as Magneto without the safeguards," he added. "He doesn't have Magneto's connection with the past. Magneto's persecution as a Gypsy during World War II meant that he had a certain emotional investment, not just in making sure there was no mutant holocaust, but in the possibility that he could become what he hated — the mutant version of Hitler.

"Magneto has also gone through a bunch of different changes in his life, from super villain to misunderstood super hero to frustrated guardian of the New Mutants to leader of the Hellfire Club. When you have someone as powerful as Exodus interpreting Magneto's life, which part of Magneto's life does he reflect the most?" he posed.

"Exodus is the next big thing:

In the original plot synopsis developed by Nicieza and Harras last February, Cortez emerged as the main villain. Early in the planning stages, Magneto was also to play a key role in the crossover. When that changed, what happened to Quicksilver and Scarlet Witch's "Blood Ties" with no father on stage? "Who Magneto is and what he's about and how he influences other people, though, will be a predominant theme throughout the storyline," Nicieza assured. The actions of both Cortez and Exodus would force Quicksilver and Scarlet Witch into a lot of self-reflection about their father, especially when Exodus wants them to take over their father's mantle.

LEGACIES AND ROLES

"What really is the legacy of being the child of someone you really hate, and cannot escape from at all?" Harras asked. "No matter how many times you try to lead a normal life, there are going to be people who are going to go after you because of who you are. [Exodus] needs somebody to hang onto, and the children of Magneto become very important."

For example, the potential is created for Quicksilver to leave the crossover with decisions finally resolved in his mind about both his relationship with his father and his role in X-Factor, not to mention his relationship with Crystal. As for further ramifications, Harras added that the Black Knight will feel the effects of Quicksilver's latter decision "in a major way," forcing him (by **AVENG-**

ERS #369) to make a decision about how to deal with Sersi.

To use Luna in the crossover raised interesting issues, Harras added, because she is a human, her mother is an Inhuman, her father a mutant, and her grandfather one of the most powerful mutants on Earth and a man who has dedicated his life to protecting mutantkind from persecution by. . . humans. "Luna is the character that links the two books," he noted. "Just by the fact of her existence, she seemed like the natural linkage. Her importance will become even more vital because she is the heir, the heir who doesn't really measure up."

. . .dissention in the AVENGERS.

Luna's kidnapping could also strike a bittersweet chord between Scott Summers and Jean Grey, setting the groundwork for a major, major event in their lives at the end of the year, Nicieza teased. "It hearkens back to their fear not just about what happened to them in 'X-Cutioner's Song,' but also when Nathan was kidnapped by Apocalypse and sent into the future," he explained. "That's how they lost their baby, their child."

PRESSURES

Nicieza and Lobdell added that, because much character development does not occur until they dive into the actual writing process, they cannot at this point guarantee who will be at the forefront or take a back seat of the adventure. Well, except that something happens to Wolverine that takes him out of the action, and it ain't pretty. Again, Nicieza would only tease: "A lot of people make decisions that they normally wouldn't make. Xavier is taking steps that he never would have taken before. The pressure's really starting to get on all these guys."

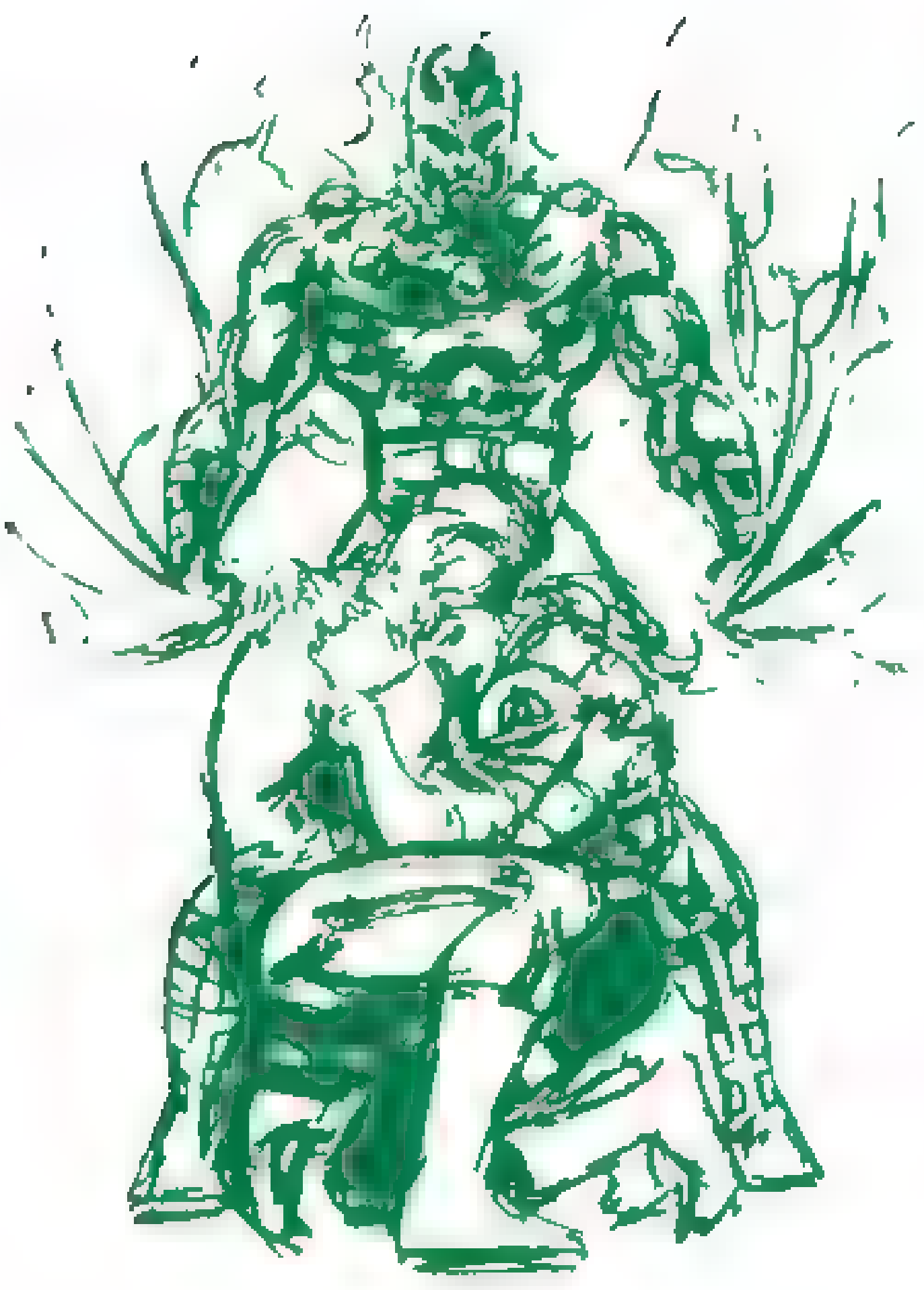
Character developments are flying fast and furious over at **AVENGERS WEST COAST**, as well. Editor Nel Yomtov revealed that, thanks to a startling death in issue #100, Hawkeye definitely *won't* be himself.

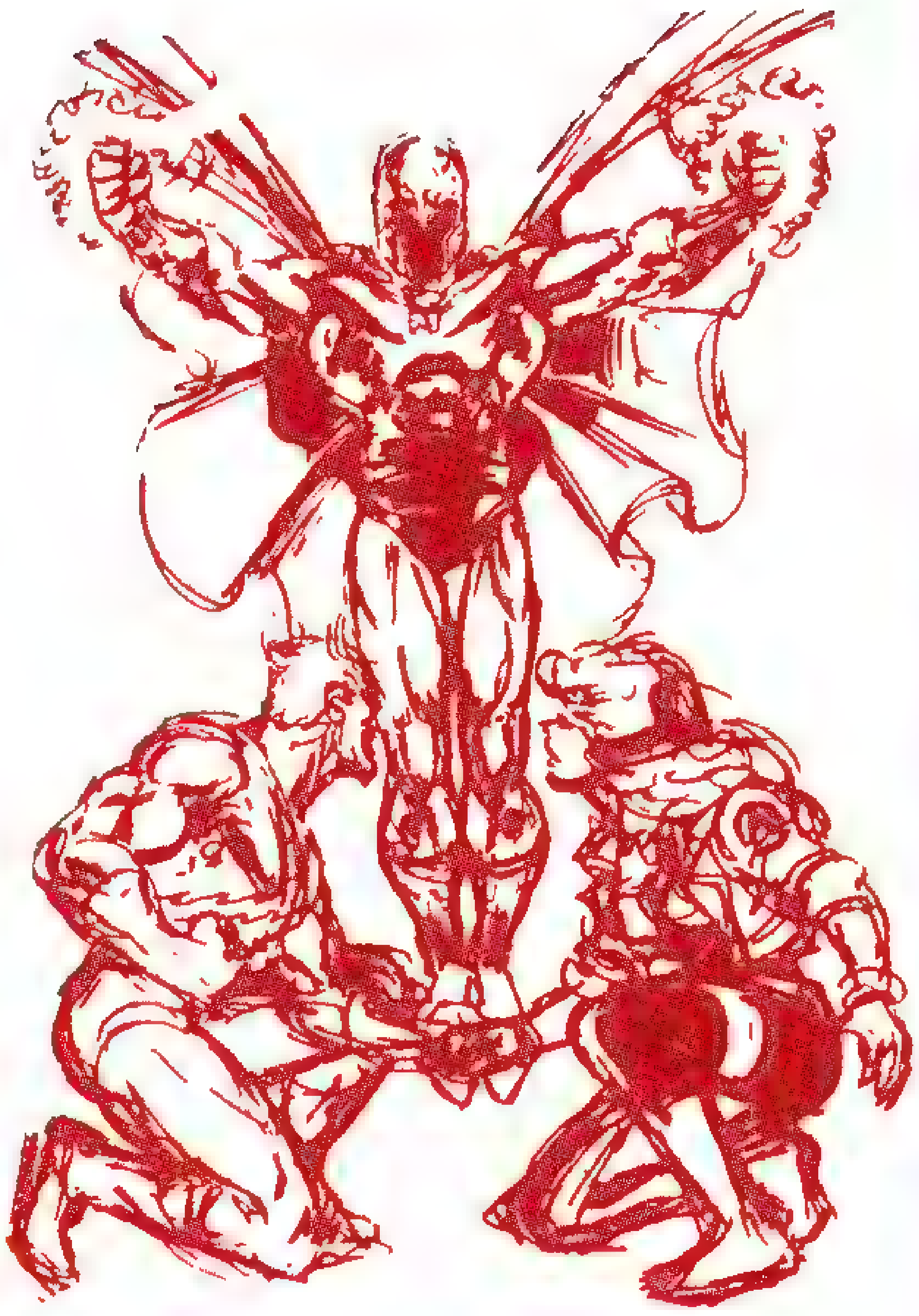
And the cynical loner USAgent will finally be finding a friend and ally in Spider-Woman. According to Nel, he wanted to develop the relationship to create communication between the Agent and the team. The idea is that he will become close enough to her that he feels that she is one person whom he can approach and talk to while the rest of the team members interact with one another. "Their lives, as different as they may seem, actually have a lot of parallels in the past," Yomtov said.

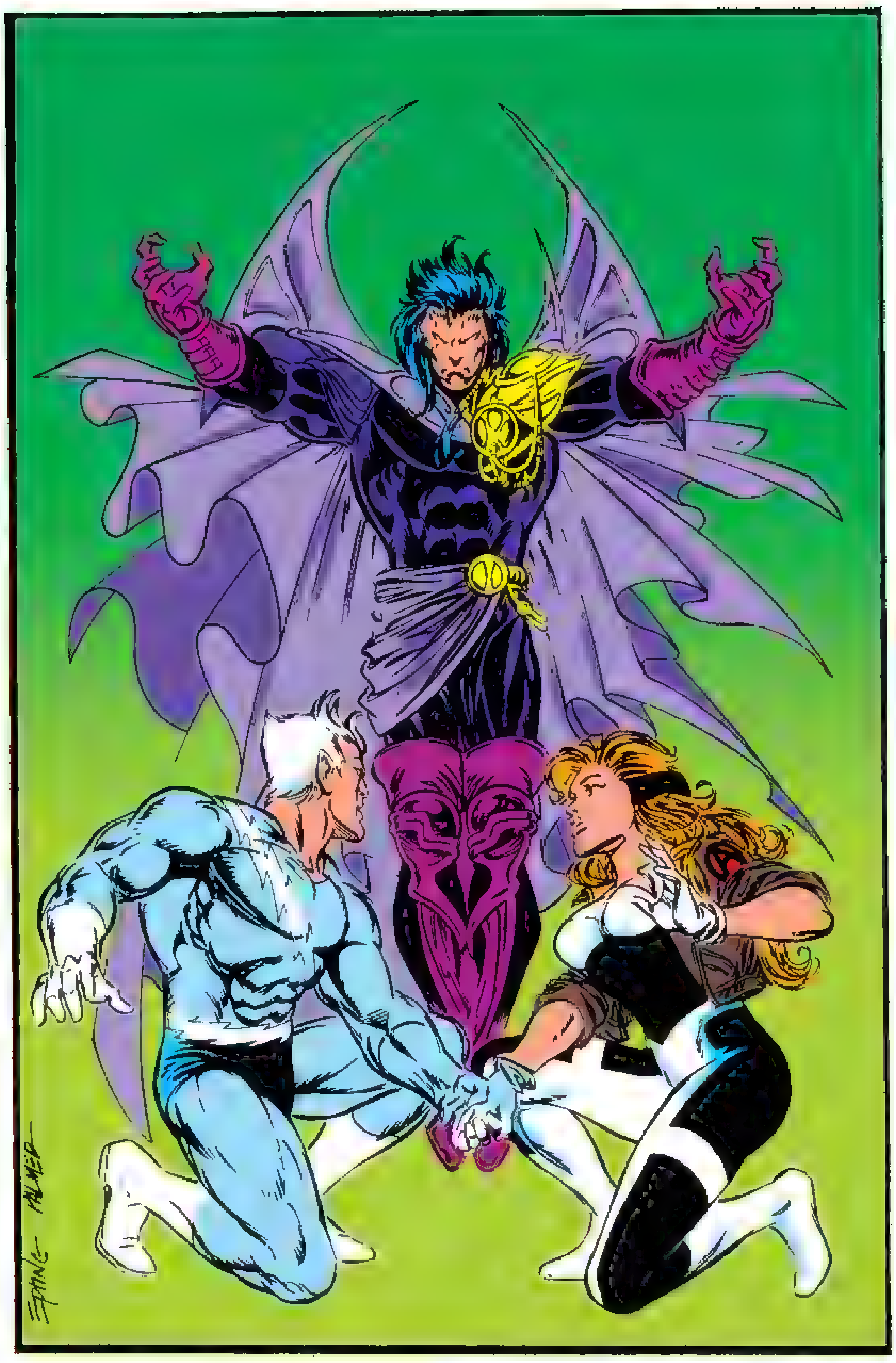
"As a single parent, she feels extremely torn between her role as a super hero and what she feels her role as a mother should be," he elaborated. "She has a lot of ambivalence toward the concept of family because her family with a husband didn't work, and she feels a lot of guilt. USAgent, according to his origin, feels very responsible for the death of his parents. It's a burden, the 'Marvel angst' that our characters are so noted for."

Of course, one of the major treats in a crossover such as this occurs when two characters from different corners of the Marvel Universe meet and interact. Since both books have carried a reputation for being character-driven, Macchio hoped for results that would be more than just fun. "I think it would be interesting to see how a new team of Aven-

(Left ro right) Dave Ross, Roy Thomas, and Nel Yomtov at the X-Men/Avengers summit, discussing ways in which the AVENGERS WEST COAST will participate in the crossover. Photo by Steve Saffel







The evolution of a cover—as Magneto's role in the crossover changed, he was replaced on the cover of AVENGERS #369 by Exodus, as seen in these pencils by Steve Epting and in the finished piece by Steve Epting and Tom Palmer.

gers interacts with this team of X-Men, and how a somewhat younger team of X-Men deals with the Avengers," he offered. "Would they have a sort of deference towards them? Would there be animosity? As far as matching the powers in fights and all that stuff, I'm not as interested in that as in how they would deal with each other as people."

"In a lot of ways, a crossover is just putting a puzzle together," Nicieza said. "You have to get from Point A to Point B; so much of what your characters do is focused solely on that, with the only characterization being the opportunity to mix a couple of characters who normally would not be together. It's just a matter of seeing who I'm going to have available, and then going, 'all right, this could be a neat little trick.'"

What might the outcome be?

"I don't think that Spider-Woman and Bobby [Iceman] have ever met," Lobdell said, offering an example on the most basic level. "It's been years since Jean Grey and Wanda have talked on-panel, and they both have a long history of having their minds and bodies manipulated by outside forces."

Lobdell expressed excitement at an opportunity to write the Avengers characters, tracing his interest in the Avengers back to his earliest comics reading days. "It's always been my dream to write the first wave of Marvel super heroes," he admitted. "Any opportunity I have to write them, I always enjoy myself, whether I do an Avengers villain here, a Captain America cameo there, an **EXCALIBUR** issue with the Black Panther. My first book that I ever recall reading was **AVENGERS #137**, which featured the Beast's [induction] into the Avengers, so it's kind of ironic that my first exposure to the Avengers involved highlighting an **X-MEN** character. I'm looking forward to working with the Avengers, even if it's just for an issue or two."

Harras agreed that character interaction also interested him — more than battle pair ups — including interaction between Avengers team mates such as ex-couple Scarlet Witch and the Vision. According to Ralph Macchio, indeed, the timing of the crossover is perfect, given Harras's connection to the X-Men as editor and the particular direction [as writer] he has taken the East Coast Avengers team, which Macchio described as more like the X-Men in terms of an "outsider" quality.

"The Avengers were being presented as guys who have everything and are very conventional," Harras offered. "I think that's incredibly boring. But if you put a little grit on them, and a little anger, I guess in some sense it does bring them closer to the X-Men. Also, getting that family feelingQthe crossover would not work at all if you didn't have a family feeling among the two teams, that can lend some sort of emotional feeling when they come across something that threatens them both."

ON THE WAR FRONT

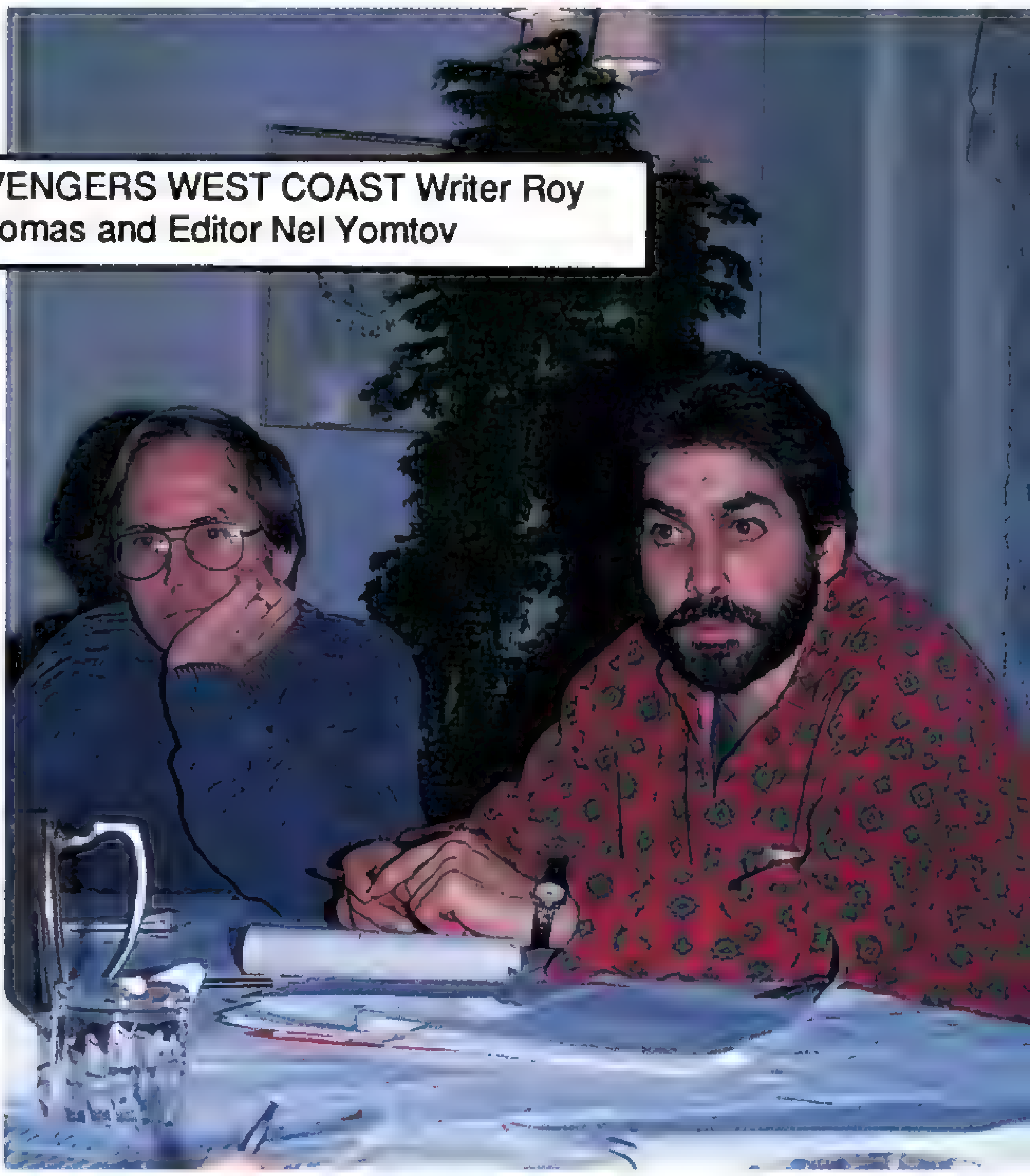
As for that war in Genosha, the creative teams only offered tantalizing tidbits: on the surface, mutates are dying by the thousands from the Legacy disease, and mob paranoia has caused the human population to instigate mass genocide. Behind the scenes, Nicieza revealed only that Cortez is pulling some of the strings. After all, quantity may not equal quality, but a lot of dead mutates would add up, and now that Magneto has been revealed as still alive, Cortez needs to win back his lead in the Upstarts [described by Nicieza as a "billionaires boys club" competing in a mutant *Death Race 2000*].

All that Harras and Nicieza would add is that, by the end of the conflict in Genosha, the Avengers would be left with some big decisions, and they will definitely be breaking their ties with the United Nations. "I think it will be interesting to see how the Avengers react to Genosha, which is something they may not be keenly aware of," Harras said. "As a U.N.-connected group, the Avengers have to go against certain U.N. sanctions to get there. That sets up a lot of conflict among them. Genosha's closest approximation is South Africa." Scott Lobdell cited Bosnia-Hercegovina as a similar situation in the modern-day world of reality.

"There are going to be major changes in the set-up of the Avengers," Harras stressed, though the actual parting from the U.N. won't affect his plotting that much, given the fact that he has never stressed the U.N. connection in his run of the book. "The U.N. split will just be a sub-text of their conversation, not their main issue, when the Avengers get to Genosha."

All of which may be a great deal more important to the Avengers West Coast, who will discover that they do not necessarily agree with their East Coast teammates on a number of key issues. So suggested Nel Yomtov, who is in the process of setting up the final events that lead to the new **FORCE WORKS** title. "The real critical thing for me to define in this series is the relationship between the East and West Coast Avengers," he explained in practical terms. "I don't want them to grow closer. I want to use this opportunity to develop dissension in the ranks of the Avengers. If I can gain much of that and have the other books pick up on it here and there, I will feel that this has succeeded in setting up what I want in the future."

UNCANNY X-MEN Writer Scott Lobdell (left) and Editor/writer Bob Harras (right) at the summit. Photos by Steve Saffel



AVENGERS WEST COAST Writer Roy Thomas and Editor Nel Yomtov

For the creative teams, it all comes back to Nicieza's guarantee: "wide, sweeping consequences," or, in Lobdell's words, "What happens in the course of this Genosha story line will have a major impact on the dynamics between humans and mutants for years to come."

He added only that Genosha will not be blowing up. . .*yet*. . .and that he is surprised and delighted by the conclusion Nicieza conceived for the crossover. "We were having lunch and talking about it, when out of the blue [Fabian] said, 'Why don't we try something different this time?" Lobdell said, revealing a general tonal quality that he feels has not been seen on the X-Men side of the Marvel Universe for what he terms as far too long.

As atoms are unstable, though, Harras warns that fans should not read current plot plans as any sort of "bible" the creative teams are bound to follow. Over the summer [and in the weeks following the time this article must go to press], editors and writers will be exchanging ideas and fine-tuning characterization and plot. In other words, when it comes to crossovers, count on all sorts of last minute juicy developments.

"That's how you write," he said. "In 'Galactic Storm,' it wasn't until the end that we said, 'well, the bomb's going to go off.' Originally, we didn't want to do that.

"So, by the time the series comes out, it could be completely different."

Anya Martin's full bio reveals that she has been associated with the X-universe since her days as an award-winning costumer attending the Atlanta Fantasy Fair. In a professional capacity, she has been associated with Tundra publishing and with a number of publications both in the comics field and in mainstream journalism.

PRO FILES

Steve Epting

— Steve Behling

I used to look at **THE AVENGERS** [and think], 'that would be a book I would really *not* want to draw,' because it had all that machinery all over the walls," penciler Steve Epting said in a humorous tone. Yet, in an amazingly short period of time, he has helped create a distinctive, very '90s look for that very same book.

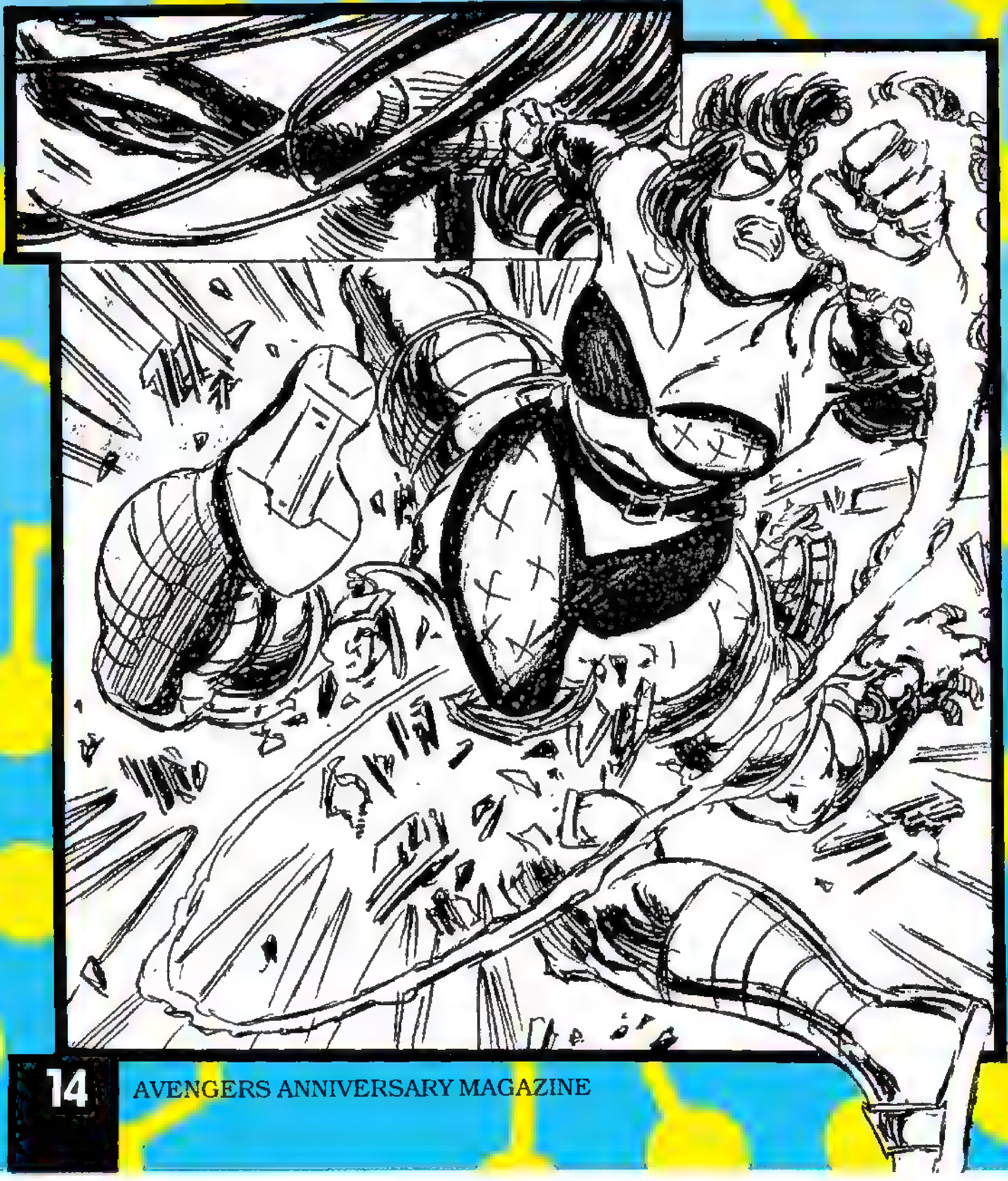
Before he came on **THE AVENGERS**, Epting attended college at the University of South Carolina, where he was a graphic design major. He "did a little bit of graphic design" when he left college, before landing a job with now-defunct First Comics in 1989. His work appeared in the series *Whisper*, as well as in a few back-up stories for the classic *Nexus* series. This led to his penciling and inking two spin-off mini-series, *Hammer of God* and *Hammer of God: Hammer of Justice*. "I was a big fan of *Nexus*, real familiar with all the characters," Epting said. Unfortunately, *Hammer of Justice* "was the last thing First published. After that happened, I was mailing in submissions, but everybody told me I had no chance of getting hired that way," Epting stated.

Fortunately for Epting, 'everybody' turned out to be wrong. "Howard Mackie [then **AVENGERS** editor] called me from a mailed-in submission, right before he left editing." At that time, **THE AVENGERS** was running bi-weekly, and another penciler was needed to alternate every other issue. "Whoever was supposed to alternate didn't work out and I ended up doing all the bi-weeklies," Epting said, and he's been with the book since.

Epting was heavily influenced by the science fiction stories he read in his youth (Isaac Asimov, in particular), and by the work of such artists as Al Williamson and Alex Raymond, the legendary creator of *Flash Gordon* — "Real heroic figures," he said, and that is what he tries to project within the framework of **THE AVENGERS**. He also said, "we're trying to give it [the book] an updated look. . .I've been trying to work on the technology. . .there's stuff like that that the **X-MEN** have." Quite a change of tune from the man who once said he didn't want to draw **THE AVENGERS** because of all the machinery! But it is the essence of change, he feels, that is keeping his work fresh and exciting.

One of the main challenges of the book is figuring out how to handle the intricate scenes involving the Avengers' multi-character cast. Epting noted that he has "to be careful not to let certain characters drop into the background. Some of the secondary characters. . .I don't want it to feel like they're not even there." He tries to give each character a "distinct personality" through the way they're drawn, through their physicality. Also difficult is penciling the non-action scenes. "It's challenging . . .people are standing around in a room talking. And at the same time, that's when you really have to worry about the characters' expressions and gestures."

Characterized by Tom Palmer as "a very modest fellow," and "very quiet, laid back. . .I think very quietly confident in his abilities," Steve Epting is looking towards the future with his work on **THE AVENGERS**, despite the machinery!



Tom Palmer

PRO FILES

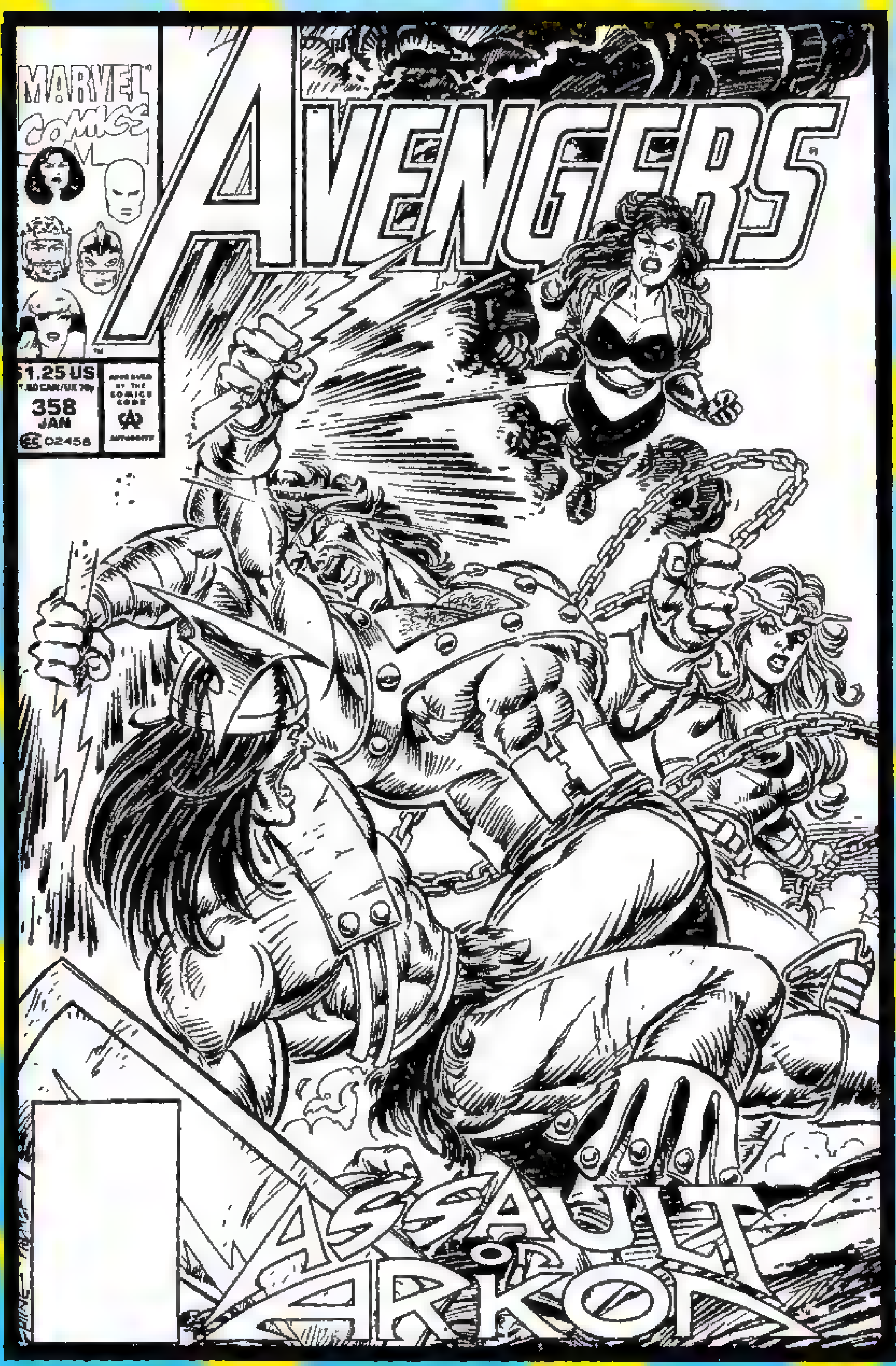
— Steve Behling

"Ralph's going to have to buy a firearm or something to get rid of me on this book!" said inker/colorist Tom Palmer of his current run with **THE AVENGERS**. It is unlikely that Editor Ralph Macchio would contemplate such an act, given Palmer's tenure, familiarity, and sheer enthusiasm for the title.

Upon graduating from art school in the late '60s, Palmer began working in the art field. At the same time, he came to Marvel and met Sol Brodsky, who gave him his first work in comics. That was the first time he became acquainted with the book known as **THE AVENGERS**. "I was green, fledgling guy in the business," when he was given the opportunity to ink over the pencils of legendary artist John Buscema, Palmer said. "And how can I turn down the opportunity to work with John?. . .I think they'd come after me with a straitjacket!" During this time, Palmer also met Neal Adams and inked and colored several issues of **THE UNCANNY X-MEN**.

Palmer went on to work on such books as **TOMB OF DRACULA**, **STAR WARS**, and **2010: A SPACE ODYSSEY** before finally returning to **THE AVENGERS**. Around eight or nine years ago, as he recalled, "I got a call from Mark Gruenwald (then **AVENGERS** editor) who wanted to know if I would do one issue of **THE AVENGERS**. Well, . .a few other guys have come and gone and I'm still there."

Excitement, along with such influences as John Buscema, Jack Kirby, and Gene Colan, have fueled Palmer's inking and coloring. "I was just amazed [at] the dexterity that they had. I had heroes, but here obviously there were other heroes to be seen." He feels one of the keys to his success as an inker has been careful observance of influences, mixed with his own sensibility. "I think the best thing to do," he said, "is. . .to take only the best from the people that you admire, and if you can incorporate that. . ."



And inking the book gives him insight into how it should be colored. "I have to be involved with the book," he stated, in order to properly use colors to set moods and tones for the scenes.

Palmer is particularly excited by the direction in which **THE AVENGERS** is currently heading, both on a story level, and an art level. "Bob is going to do some great things. He's only hinted at them, and even if he told me I wouldn't divulge them," he said. And of particular interest to him are the changes being made in the book's overall appearance. "Issue #364 was the first chance we had to use airbrushing. . .and it shows. And in a few months, they're going to add a few more percentages of color . . .there'll be more subtle hues and values. I think the book is just going to change."

In the final analysis, Tom Palmer's unbridled enthusiasm has kept him with **THE AVENGERS** for a tremendous, highly creative run, one which he sees no reason to end. If he left now, he said, he'd be "leaving the tour bus before we've gotten to the main event! This is going to be a great ride."

AVENGERS FUTURES

THE CHANGING OF THE GUARD

Stan Lee once remarked that the toughest thing about writing the Avengers was remembering who they were. After the forthcoming changes in both Avengers and Avengers West Coast, shakeups will leave even the most dedicated readers dizzy.

The defining characteristic of the Avengers, now celebrating their thirtieth anniversary, has always been change. This tradition of change began in 1964; Stan Lee, in the now-classic "The Old Order Changeth," did what had never occurred in a comic book team before: he *radically* changed the team. In **Avengers #16**, Giant-Man, Wasp, Iron Man and Thor left the Avengers, creating an opening for Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch. Since that classic issue, the Avengers have had a constantly rotating and evolving roster.

As we enter the 30th anniversary of Earth's Mightiest Heroes, the change which has always marked the Avengers books will accelerate, becoming an even greater facet of both **THE AVENGERS** and **AVENGERS WEST COAST.** Not merely change of members, but change that transforms the basic motivations and philosophies of both the East and West Coast groups.

THEY WERE ONCE EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES. THEY'RE ABOUT TO BECOME AVENGERS.

According to **AVENGERS** Editor Ralph Macchio, "the team is going to finally live up to their name. The fans always ask why they're called 'Avengers'; they don't *avenge* anybody. Basically, the Avengers began this change almost a year ago in 'Operation: Galactic Storm'. The Avengers made a life-changing decision to kill the Supreme Intelligence, creating a rift between Captain America and the new Avengers — sort of, the old guard vs. the new."

Bob Harras, the writer of **THE AVENGERS** for more than a year, now, commented that, "the thing I'm trying to change in the book is its past 'hero-of-the-month' mentality. I think the Avengers are a family, a group of people who intermingle with each other and have motivations that *don't* always match. They're friends, and in a world that is increasingly untrusting of heroes with any sort of powers, these individuals may be the only 'peers' they've got. My approach is to make the team more introverted and less extroverted. What I mean is that this isn't 'Bad Guy X attacks town and the Avengers run to the rescue' anymore. I'm trying to flesh these characters out. These characters have enough problems and issues in their own lives to go another thirty years' worth of issues. 'Course, that's not to say they'll live that long.

> **"A major Marvel hero is going to die in the first issue of FORCE WORKS."**

"And, of course, that doesn't mean that the team is turning its back on the traditions that defined them. No, the team is coming into the nineties. They're going to be. . .meaner, but so are the times. We'll be dealing with how this team can remain Earth's Mightiest Heroes when the world itself is falling apart."

Like all philosophies, these changes affect the lives of the Avengers. "Captain America is finding himself out of the loop with the other members," Harras remarked. "While he's considered by most the quintessential member of the Avengers, these aren't the same old Avengers. His basic moral and ethical code may no longer be consistent with who or what the Avengers are today.

"Ironically, except for perhaps a few members, the only thing that won't be changing drastically in the near future is the core membership of the team. Within the Avengers you'll be seeing more interpersonal conflict than ever before. The Sersi/Black Knight/Crystal love triangle will evolve into a Black Knight/Crystal/Quicksilver triangle as Quicksilver, Crystal's husband who first joined the team in **AVENGERS #16,** not only returns to the book, but may find himself in a pivotal role. Quicksilver's been enjoying a lot of attention by fans in the pages of **X-FACTOR,** so the Avengers [tie-in] will be a great opportunity to take the character even farther.

"Of course, Sersi's sanity will continue to erode in the months ahead; what part the Black Knight will play is still being determined. And. . .there'll be one more major blowout with Proctor. The Vision, one of my all-time favorite characters, will become a little more visible, if you'll pardon the pun, and we'll see what's going on inside him as he will actually be dealing with his lost humanity, perhaps trying to get it back. He's had a family, and he's lost it. Who knows what effect that can have on a person. The Swordsman and Magdaline will also play a big part, especially in light of their past involvement with the Gatherers.

"Hera's curse on Hercules will become an issue as we see how it effects his relationship with this woman he's been dating, Taylor Dane," he continued. "And Hank Pym, the original Ant-Man, Giant-Man, Goliath, Goliath II, whatever you call him, will

be returning to the team. It's funny, because he was an Avenger way before Captain America.

"Like all the best books Marvel's ever produced, the Avengers will be character driven."

For an overall sense of storyline direction, Ralph Macchio stated that, "Avengers #366 begins a storyline that will drastically affect the Avengers. Without revealing too much, the Kree's return for revenge will develop a conflict with repercussions that will affect the book for years to come."

SPARING NO CHANGE

When the West Coast Avengers were first formed in 1984, the purpose of the team was to safeguard and support the country and world as Avengers. And now, on the eve of the **AWC's** tenth anniversary, the team's discovered — much to their disappointment — that they're sort of substitute Avengers. . .hand-me-down characters not taken seriously by either rest of the world or their fellow east coast counterparts. Again, change will drive a new direction to the book. In fact, **AVENGERS WEST COAST** ends with issue #102.

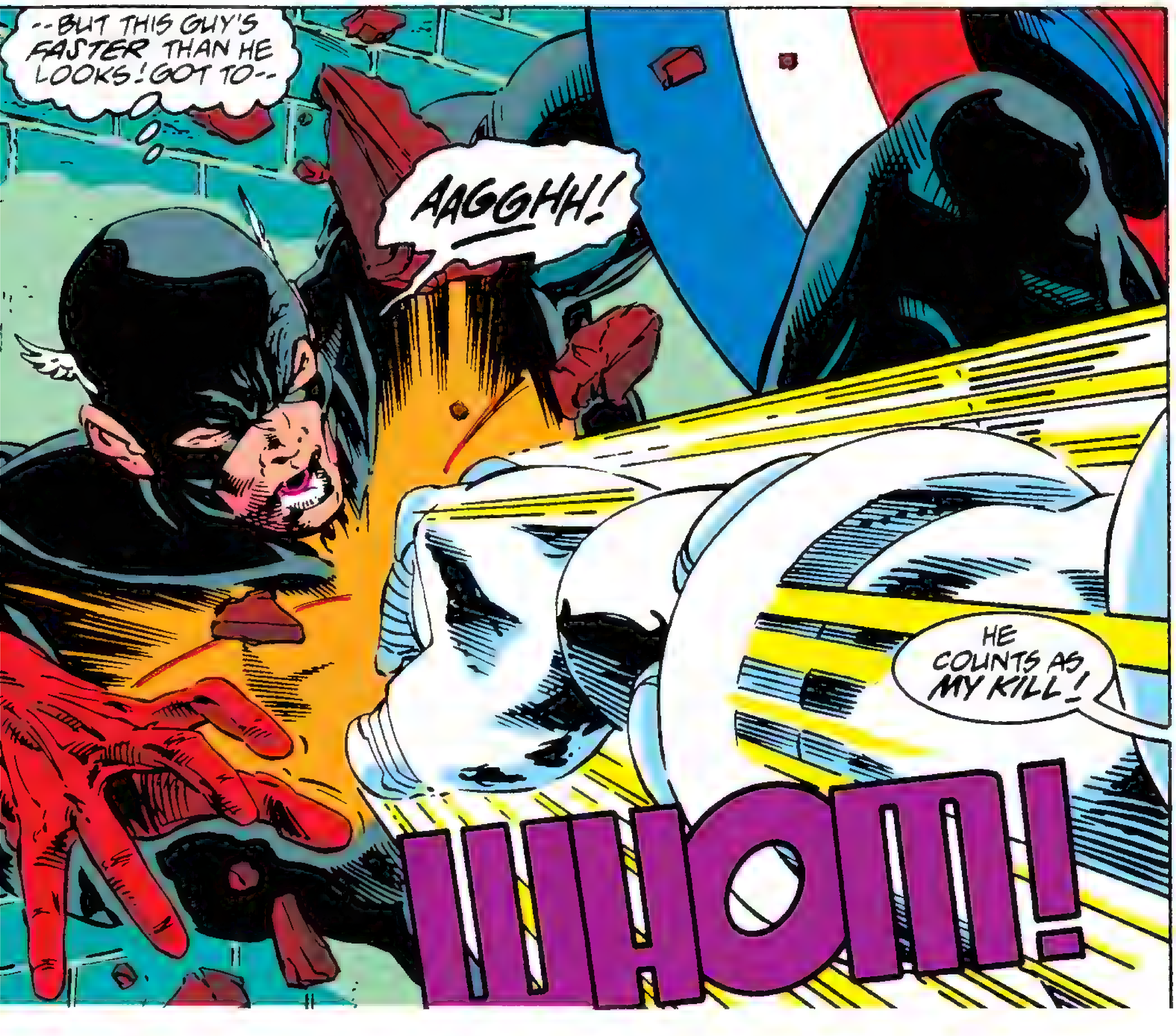
In the wake of a member's tragic death, broken promises and dreams, a loss of purpose, and loss of Avengers status, a new team will be born. . .**FORCE WORKS.**

"It'll be a different sort of title — in fact, it's not even going to be an Avengers book anymore. It's an aggressive turning away from Avengers tradition," Editor Nel Yomtov revealed. "It's simply not the same old team. First of all, these are characters that are tired of being treated like second-stringers. They're angry, dismayed, and frankly *very* ticked off by the second class treatment they've received. By the end of **AVENGERS WEST COAST #102,** they've shed blood and made the ultimate sacrifice for the sake of the world, and it's gotten them nowhere.

"Keep in mind, these are characters of immense power. Of course, there's Iron Man, who will join the group and serve as technical and financial backer. His arrival prompts the sudden departure of War Machine, *aka* Jim Rhodes, who was once Iron Man's most trusted companion. Their ongoing feud has been fully detailed in recent issues of **IRON MAN.**

The Scarlet Witch will lead the group in the field. Most of what people expect from the Scarlet Witch will change. She's becoming more powerful and will be indispensable to the workings of the group. Her ability to lead and the further evolution of her powers will be dealt with in an upcoming **SCARLET WITCH** limited series.

Spider-Woman and U.S.Agent make up the last two members of the previously established Force Works team. The U.S.Agent seems to have lost some of his brashness and arrogance of late, but for reasons not yet explored. He'll get it back. Spider-Woman, on the other hand, is slowly discovering


--BUT THIS GUY'S FASTER THAN HE LOOKS! GOT TO--
AAGGHH!
HE COUNTS AS MY KILL!
WHOM!

WELL... GOTTA GO.

more about her origins as revealed in the **SPIDER-WOMAN** limited series due out late this fall. Wonder Man will also play a big part in the genesis of Force Works, even though he will not be a member of the team. An all-new fifth member of the team is in the "works," Yomtov revealed cryptically.

According to Andy Lanning, who, with Dan Abnett, will write the series, "They are all incredibly talented people who have to live up to a certain image. U.S.Agent is in Captain America's shadow. Spider-Woman is in Spider-Man's, and the Scarlet Witch is in her ex-husband's [the Vision].

"The name 'Works' is actually derived from this huge piece of computer technology that Stark has constructed for the team. This computer has the ability to recognize and spot potential dangers for the rest of the world, and will operate in conjunction with the Scarlet Witch's mutant abilities to affect probabilities. A lot of what happens with the team will stem from this computer. The name of the team is actually the name of the building they make their headquarters."

In addition, Force Works is going to be more public. According to Nel, they'll be involved with building a public relations campaign. Readers will see some of the first major advertising for a super hero team within the Marvel Universe. How this "commercial" approach to heroing affects the rest of the super hero community will be the subject of future storylines.

Hawkeye will not be involved in the team and will head out on his own after the X-Men/Avengers crossover of **AVENGERS WEST COAST #101.** He will star in a limited series coming out in late '93 (see "Avengers Solo" article).

"Force Works will be a different sort of series in the sense that these heroes will be getting their hands *dirty* saving the world," said Abnett, who, with partner Lanning, has scored a big success on **PUNISHER** and on a number of the Marvel UK books. When asked about what will be happening in **FORCE WORKS**, Dan only remarked with a frustrated tone, "Well, Nel won't let us blow up the world."

According to a FAX from Lanning and Abnett, the changes in the lives of these characters are going to be dramatic. "A major Marvel hero is going to die in the first issue of **FORCE WORKS**. This individual's death is going to have long-standing effects on the team."

The Scarlet Witch's powers will also be increased dramatically as we develop her into one of the most powerful characters in the Marvel Universe.

The duo of writers has a lot of ideas for the new series, the fate of which often depends on tight coordination with the other participants in the Avengers microverse, including Editors Nel Yomtov and Ralph Macchio, and **AVENGERS** writer Bob Harras. For example, the FAX revealed, "We're playing with the possibility of [using] Mr. Immortal, a character seen briefly in AWC #48-49. We love this character. Mr. I's (calling him 'Mr. I' is cooler than Mr. Immortal) power, as we see it, is his ability to regenerate his own body when he is killed. He was by far the most interesting character in the Great Lakes Avengers. And more, each time he dies, he comes back with a new super power. This is his body's natural way of evolving into a being that can't be killed. If he ever does develop a super power he actually likes, he may actively try not to get killed, something at odds with the character. We've heard that fans in America like it when a character dies. So from now on, you can expect a lot of death in each issue.

Lanning and Abnett are still sketching out the first year of tales, and have proposed that a splinter group of the Kree race may be planning revenge on members of the Avengers for their participation in the Galactic Storm holocaust, and one of their prime targets is now a part of the Force Works cast, so that the ramifications will begin to appear in the very first issue of the new title. This storyline will involve particularly careful communication with Avengers writer Bob Harras, Editor Ralph Macchio, and the **FORCE WORKS** editorial/creative team in order to bring the complex tale to fruition.

A NEW AVENGERS WEST COAST IS IN THE *WORKS*

When Stan Lee remarked that the toughest thing about writing the Avengers was remembering who they were, the new creators behind both teams are betting that he'll have an even tougher time recognizing the teams of today. And for new readers, the new Avengers are going to be even harder to forget.

Jim Kreuger recently moved his entire comics collection from the Midwest to New York City, where he is a copywriter for the Marvel Promotions and Advertising department and a semi-regular contributor to MARVEL AGE and the other magazine specials.

It's Really Big:

The Avengers and Major Events

A legendary super hero returns to life. A battle for interstellar supremacy is waged between two powerful alien races and Earth is caught in the middle. A time-travelling super villain attempts to stop the ascension of the Cosmic Madonna. An ancient demon is brought forth and brings revelations that shatter the lives of several heroes. Who are at the center of all of these pivotal events?

The Avengers, Earth's mightiest heroes.

Throughout the thirty years of their existence, The Avengers have served as the launching pad for many of the most important events in the Marvel universe. The team seems to be a magnet for these big stories, inviting writers to set in motion plotlines that will be felt all over the Marvel's continuity. What makes the Avengers the center of these events and why do stories that happen in the Avengers seem to effect the whole Marvel Universe?

Earth's Mightiest Heroes

According to **AVENGERS** Editor Ralph Macchio, the **AVENGERS** are at the core of the Marvel Universe. "The characters in the **AVENGERS** are at the center of the Marvel web, whenever something happens to the team, the radiation up the web is felt all over the place. I think the reason for that is, initially, the characters in the Avengers were characters that had their own series: Iron Man, Thor, Hulk, Giant Man and The Wasp. They all had their own comics or frequently guest-starred, and so when something happened in **THE AVENGERS**, it had to have an effect in most of the rest of the books that we were publishing at the time," said Macchio.

Current **AVENGERS** writer Bob Harras has changed the line-up of the team by replacing established heroes with a group of 'second stringers.' However, Macchio's theory of the Avengers central placement in the Marvel Universe still holds true.

"In the current Avengers, while less well known, are still representatives from all over the Marvel Universe. There's Captain America, perhaps the ultimate super hero, Hercules—who has links to the mythological parts of the universe; Crystal—who is an Inhuman which ties her to the Fantastic Four; plus she is married to Quicksilver, thus connecting to the X-Men; Sersi, who is an Eternal. There's the Black Knight whose lineage is goes back into ancient times with King Arthur and Merlin, and you have The Vision, who has been a been a member of the Avengers for about 20 years. So even though these aren't characters who have their own series, they still inspire stories that are right at the center of the Marvel Universe," Macchio said.

"That's one of the keys to the Avengers," Harras said. "They are the world's mightiest heroes. They represent the best of the best. To be an Avenger is a great honor and a great responsibility. When you have a group of heroes who are that powerful and influential, I think that the big event stories flow out of the group."

In the Beginning

Macchio pointed out that **THE AVENGERS** featured major events that effected the Marvel universe right from the beginning of the series. "Even as far back as **AVENGERS #4,** things were happening in the book that changed the universe as the readers knew it. When Captain America returned to life, a link was established between this new upstart company and the comics of the 1940s and '50s. This single issue established a continuity back to World War II and added to Marvel's rich history."

The changes have been nearly constant since then. From the first formation of the Masters of Evil to the Kree-Sh'lar war at the center of "Operation: Galactic Storm," it seems like every time a major event shakes up the status quo, the Avengers are at the center of it. The writers and editors of the Avengers line of comics feel that there are many reasons for the team's presence at these turning points.

"...the big event stories flow out of the group."

Roy Thomas, former editor-in-chief of Marvel Comics, writer of the "Kree-Skrull War" storyline, and current writer of **AVENGERS WEST COAST,** explained that The Avengers were always meant to be the center of the epic stories.

"When Stan created The Avengers, he was looking for an 'all star game' feeling. These were, and are, the most important, powerful and influential characters in the Marvel universe. The best of the best. The Avengers are the heroes that can be pitted against the villain or villains that are just too big for any single hero to handle. The very nature of the team leads to big events occurring."

Bob Harras, current writer of the **AVENGERS** and editor of the X-Men line of comics agreed. "When you're writing a story featuring Earth's mightiest heroes, the stories tend to become grander in scope and bigger in scale in order to fit in all the characters. Also, each of the characters in the group brings with them a history that can be mined for stories."

One of Harras's favorite **AVENGERS** story is Steve Englehart's "Cosmic Madonna" storyline. "What I liked about the the story was that it was a story of people wrapped up in a cosmic saga. The story had a great villain in Immortus/Kang, but the personal stories that went along with it — The Swordsman's relationship with Mantis, and the Scarlet Witch and The Vision getting together, established just the right balance for me. A thing that I think some writers forget with THE **AVENGERS** is the 'people' side. What I'm trying to establish with the epic stories on my run of the book is to place the personal battles each of the characters must face within the constructs of the cosmic tales."

Through Today

"A good example of what I'm talking about," Harras said, "is the X-Men/Avengers crossover. The story will have far reaching effects on the Marvel Universe. It's a great big adventure will lots of heroes and villains and plenty of action. It brings back Magneto. It shakes up all the teams involved. But its catalyst is one of the smallest and most personal in the heroes' world — Luna. Because, Luna's parents are Quicksilver and Crystal, both the Avengers and the X-Men feel that she is a part of their family. This allows me, as well as the other writers, to explore the interpersonal relationships that the result from the larger story."

Nel Yomtov, editor of **AVENGERS WEST COAST**, hinted at some of the surprising changes that result from the X-Men/Avengers crossover. "The crossover is very important culminating factor in Avengers and Avengers West Coast history. The west coast team will be coming off a very big event of their own in issue #98-100 of **AVENGERS WEST COAST**, where they have will face Satannish the new Lethal Legion, and Mephisto. This story sets up the changes that are going to occur. Several heroes will leave the team, one will even die. After the battle, the team is in shambles and then they're drawn into the crossover. There is lots of friction between the two Avengers teams and that friction will cause a major rift. The story will culiminate with a split between the teams as the Avengers West Coast quit and form their own unit that is unaffiliated with the Avengers."

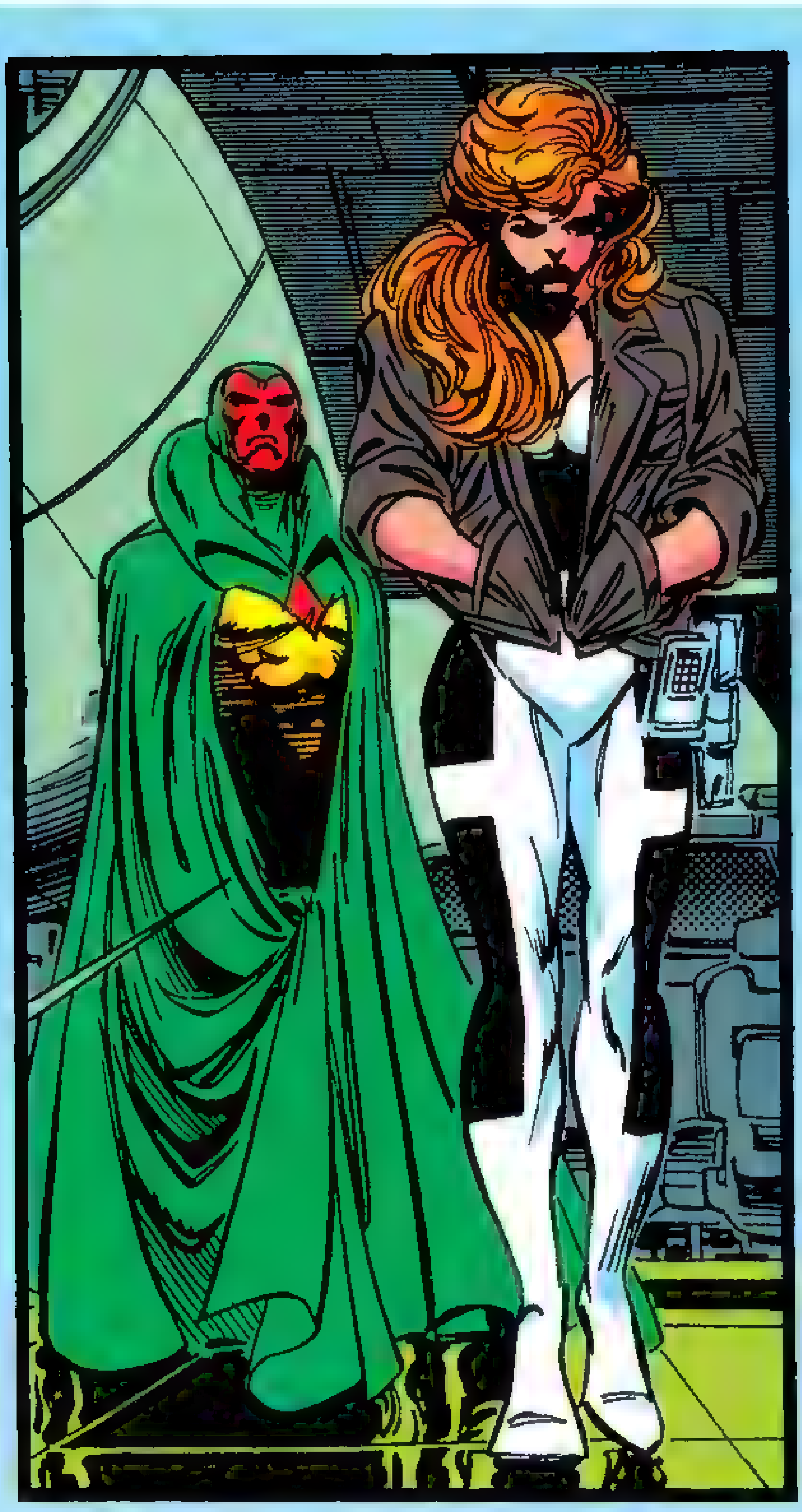
According to Yomtov, the ideas for this storyline have been in place for quite some time. That it ties in with a major crossover is a happy coincidence. "One of the interesting things about the way most of the major crossovers work as Marvel is that participation is voluntary. We don't say to the creators, 'you have to participate.' However in lots of cases, the stories just beg to have your characters participate."

Thomas agreed. "When I heard what they were doing with the Avengers/X-Men crossover, Nel and I decided to use it as a springboard for the new team. I liked the idea because I like shaking things up."

Shaking things up

Thomas is one of the writers best known for shaking things up. His Kree-Skrull War is still the Avengers story that is remembered with the most fondness by many comics creators and readers.

"The odd thing about that story was that it was never called the 'Kree-Skrull War' until after it was over," he noted. "It was just an idea that grew out of my admiration of what Stan and Jack did in the Marvel universe when they made it interrelated. That may not seem like much now, but in the '60s it was a rarity. Stan and Jack were among the first to establish an interconnectiveness between their characters. I'm not talking about Superman and Batman teaming up to fight the Joker and Luthor, because those stories didn't have a lasting effect. I'm talking about things like real alien races that appear in more than one series in the line. Before Stan and Jack there were just kind of generic aliens with no personality or history, but with the introduction of the Kree and the Skrulls we had two real races of aliens with distinct per-



sonalities, customs, and ways of life.

"One characteristic that they shared was that they were both very militaristic," he elaborated. "I drew from this idea to create the story. It only seemed logical to me that at some point these two would meet in space and at that time they would clash. It was a good story, but I think the luckiest break for me was when Neal Adams came on the book for the story. I think that the team of Neal and I took the book to a higher level."

Creators

Another way that a story can become a big event, as stated by Thomas, is when the creative team on the series works together so well that their output gets particular notice. Throughout Avengers history, there have been several teams that have combined to produce big event stories that weren't necessarily designed to be so. Examples are Stan Lee and Jack Kirby on the "Baron Zemo and his Master of Evil" plotline, Thomas and Adams on the "Kree-Skrull War," Jim Shooter and George Prez of the "Korvac Saga," and Gruenwald, Steven Grant, and John Byrne on the "Ch'thon" storyline.

"The Ch'thon story line is *my* all time Avengers big event storyline, because it was never planned to be a big event," said Mark Gruenwald, executive editor of Marvel and writer of Captain America and Quasar. "This kind of story doesn't start out as a 'big event'; its just a regular story in the book, but the ramifications are felt later."

The story involved the Scarlet Witch and Quicksilver's search for their parents. Along the way, they had the first Marvel encounter with the Book of the Darkhold, they battled the High Evolutionary, and Magneto himself became involved.

"The Ch'thon story had a lot of impact in a very contained package," Gruenwald explained. It revealed that Magneto was the father of Wanda and Pietro. It explained a lot of things about the High Evolutionary and his Knights of Wundagore. And it introduced a villain who is now at the center of the Midnight Sons universe, the demon Ch'thon. That's a lot of impact for three issues of a comic book. However I think its not surprising for the **AVENGERS**. The Avengers lend themselves to the stories with far-reaching effects because of the nature of the group."

Who you gonna call?

"The Avengers are a heterogeneous group," Gruenwald said. "They aren't together for a cause, such as Infinity Watch. Nor are they a group of all the same kinds of heroes, like the X-Men, who are mutants. The Avengers are drawn from all over the super hero spectrum. This allows for the personal stakes in virtually any given situation.

"The Avengers motto, 'Once and Avenger, always an Avenger' is vitally important to the group. Because of this motto the team has a network of about 50 heroes who can be called in for any particular mission. They can have mutants, gods, street fighters, World War II vets, immortals, the list goes on and on."

Harras agreed. "On the whole I think what makes the Avengers work is the availability of nearly any character for a story. The Avengers cast is epic, and therefore, so are the their stories."

A good example of the use of the Avengers extensive cast is Operation: Galactic Storm. "With Galactic Storm," Gruenwald said, "we held a conference with all the creators and writers where we went through all of the Avengers and decided which heroes made sense. A character like Captain Marvel, who hasn't been an Avenger for years, was chosen to play a larger role because she had outer space experience, while a character like Black Widow played a small role even though she was part of the current team."

They have the rep

Another reason the Avengers stories seem to have far reaching effect is the team's reputation in the Marvel Universe. "The Avengers are the professionals of the super hero business. They often find themselves called in by the conventional authorities when they wouldn't call in another super group," Gruenwald said.

"The government wouldn't call in the X-Men because they are a 'mutants rights group,' he continued. "They wouldn't call in the Fantastic Four because they are basically a scientist and his adventurer friends. While they have done good things and stopped some criminals, the Fantastic Four is not known as super-peace enforcers in the Marvel universe. They have an eccentric reputation. They have had many public traumas over the years, from The Baxter Building being blown up to the FF going bankrupt. Besides, there are only four of them, and when the authorities want to handle a big menace they think they need a big organization," Gruenwald continued.

Macchio agreed with this line of thinking. "The Avengers are considered the first line of defense against any really large threat anywhere. They're located in this big mansion in midtown New York. They have a very formal charter and an established hierarchy with a chairman, vice chairman, members and reservists. It seems only natural that established authorities would come to the Avengers — they run in a way bureaucrats would understand. Can you imagine the government trying to deal with the X-Men or the Secret Defenders? The Avengers are together because they share a certain sense of duty or commitment.

"They are the soldiers. They don't have to be together, they *choose* to be together."

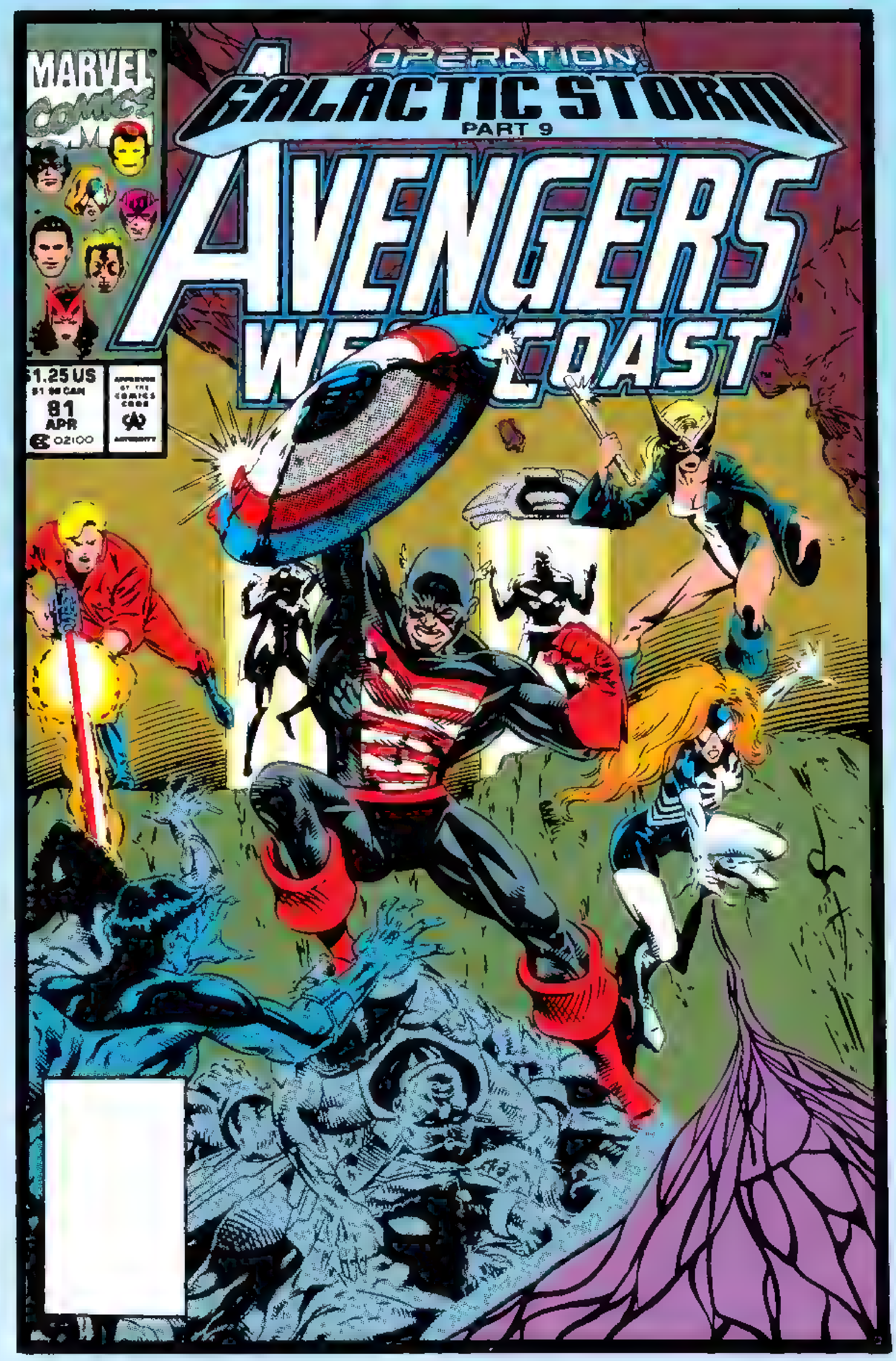
Anatomy of A Crossover:

The Making of "Operation: Galactic Storm"

According to Marvel Comics senior executive editor Mark Gruenwald three things are needed for a successful crossover.

1. *A story that has natural connections.*
2. *A major event that has never been seen before.*
3. *Lasting consequences*

Many of the writers and editors at Marvel feel that one of the best examples of a successful crossover was "Operation: Galactic Storm," which appeared in 19 issues of 7 different comic book titles in the Avengers line. This is how this outstanding event in Avengers history came into being.



"On occasion the editors at Marvel look for 'breakout events' in the Marvel Universe," Mark Gruenwald revealed. "These are stories that are too big to be contained in one series. 'Operation: Galactic Storm' blossomed out of a small storyline in **QUASAR,** which I write. In the story, Quasar was facing a menace too big for him to handle and since, at the time, he was an active Avenger, he automatically went to them for help.

"We were looking for a breakout event and the 'Galactic Storm' story was chosen as the one we would use. If we hadn't chosen it, I would have scaled the story down and it would have lasted a whole lot longer in just **QUASAR,** maybe even a whole year. But once we expanded it to the 19 parts, we got over Quasar's portion of it in 3 issues," he said.

Ralph Macchio, Avengers group editor, continued the tale: "'Galactic Storm' was a perfect crossover for **THE AVENGERS** because, even though the Kree originated in the **FANTASTIC FOUR,** the 'Kree-Skrull War' planted them right in the middle of the Avengers universe. We knew that both Avengers groups could be involved and we could use the story to redefine both groups. It is one of the crossover epics that I am most happy with."

After the story was accepted, Gruenwald, **AVENGERS** writer Bob Harras, and **WONDER MAN** Editor Fabian Nicieza worked up a tight outline as to what would happen in each of the parts. Then Gruenwald, Harras, and Nicieza met with all of the editors and creative teams of the series that would tie in to 'Operation: Galactic Storm.'

"We got together with everybody on this one, and threw out ideas," Macchio said. "Everybody contributed, from writers and pencilers right on down to letterers and colorists. One of the most interesting portions of the summit was choosing [which heroes] would be featured in the team. We felt as if we chose who would participate just like the **AVENGERS** would; we went through each member, both current and past, and chose the team members for their usefulness on the mission. There were some heated debates as to who should go on the mission and who should be left behind, just like what turned up in the story."

What resulted was the multi-part epic that drew the Avengers in the Kree-Sh'iar war, a story that is one of the most popular in Avengers' history. But does it meet with Gruenwald's criteria for a good crossover?

1 - A story that has natural connections

"Without a doubt, 'Operation: Galactic Storm' had natural connections," **AVENGERS WEST COAST** and **IRON MAN** Editor Nel Yomtov said. "The story revolved around the Avengers. The five parts I edited are some of the books I'm most proud of. I think that 'Galactic Storm' was one of the tightest crossovers we've ever done."

2 - A major event that has never been seen before

"Galactic Storm was descended from of the 'Kree-Skrull War.' We looked at that story and said 'how can we go beyond there? How can we show things that we weren't done in the previous 'super heroes in space' epic.' We took all of the cool things that that story did in 9 parts and we tried to *up* the consequences. In the original, nearly the whole story took place in the vicinity of Earth, so we said the first thing we have to do is have the characters go to the alien worlds and be *proactive*, rather than reactive. This made for a major difference when the heroes actually went to the heads of the Kree and Sh'iar Empires in an official capacity. In the first story the heroes just kind of said, 'Stay away from Earth, please, or we're going to whip you a good one,'" Gruenwald said.

"The outcome was a totally unexpected event," Macchio said. "No one suspected we would really destroy the Kree homeworld and decimate the race itself."

3 - Lasting consequences

"With the explosion of the nega-bomb during 'Galactic Storm,' not only did it alter Kree history for all time, its changed things for the Avengers. It caused Cap to rethink his role on the team and to actually leave them for a while, and it put the team on the Kree's hit list, because they are blamed for what happened," Gruenwald said.

"In fact the next major storyline in **THE AVENGERS** after they wrap-up the Avengers/X-Men crossover and finish off Proctor and the Gatherers, will be the Kree Strike Force attempting to avenge the death of the Supreme Intelligence by killing The Avengers. Now that's lasting consequences," Macchio said.

In conclusion, Macchio said, "'Operation: Galactic Storm' seemed to work on many different levels. It sustained itself all the way to the end. It shook up the Avengers and made each of the members question their place in the team."

Gruenwald added, "I think that this type of crossover is the hardest to do. It's one thing to do an 'Infinity Crusade' in which the bulk of the story will be told in a limited series, and the related stories just hang out on the side. Its another thing to develop the throughline for the story in multiple titles in which you really have to follow the entire run in order to get the story. We get letters from people who like both concepts, that's why we do both ideas. I think that we do them both very successfully, too."

Randy Meredith travels in a wide variety of artistic circles in the course of his job as publications director for the Columbus (Ohio) Museum of Art and as a frequent contributor to MARVEL AGE MAGAZINE.

The following is a list of some of the expansive and pivotal events in Avengers' history, including the comic or comics in which each appeared:

Event	Comic
Return of Captain America	Avengers 4
Baron Zemo and the Masters of Evil	Avengers 6-16
The Kree-Skrull War	Avengers 89-97
The Avengers vs. The Defenders	Avengers 115-118 Defenders 8-11
The Celestial Madonna	Avengers 129-135 Giant Size Avengers 2-4
The Korvac Saga	Avengers 168-171
Ch'thon	Avengers 185-187
Acts of Vengeance	Avengers 311-313 Avengers West Coast 53-55 Avengers Spotlight 26-28 Captain America 365-367 Damage Control II 1-4 Fantastic Four 334-336 Iron Man 250-252 Thor 411-413 Quasar 5-6
Operation: Galactic Storm	Avengers 345-347 Avengers West Coast 80-82 Captain America 398-400 Iron Man 278-279 Quasar 34-36 Thor 445-446 Wonder Man 7-9

PRO FILES

— Jaye Gardner

Roy Thomas

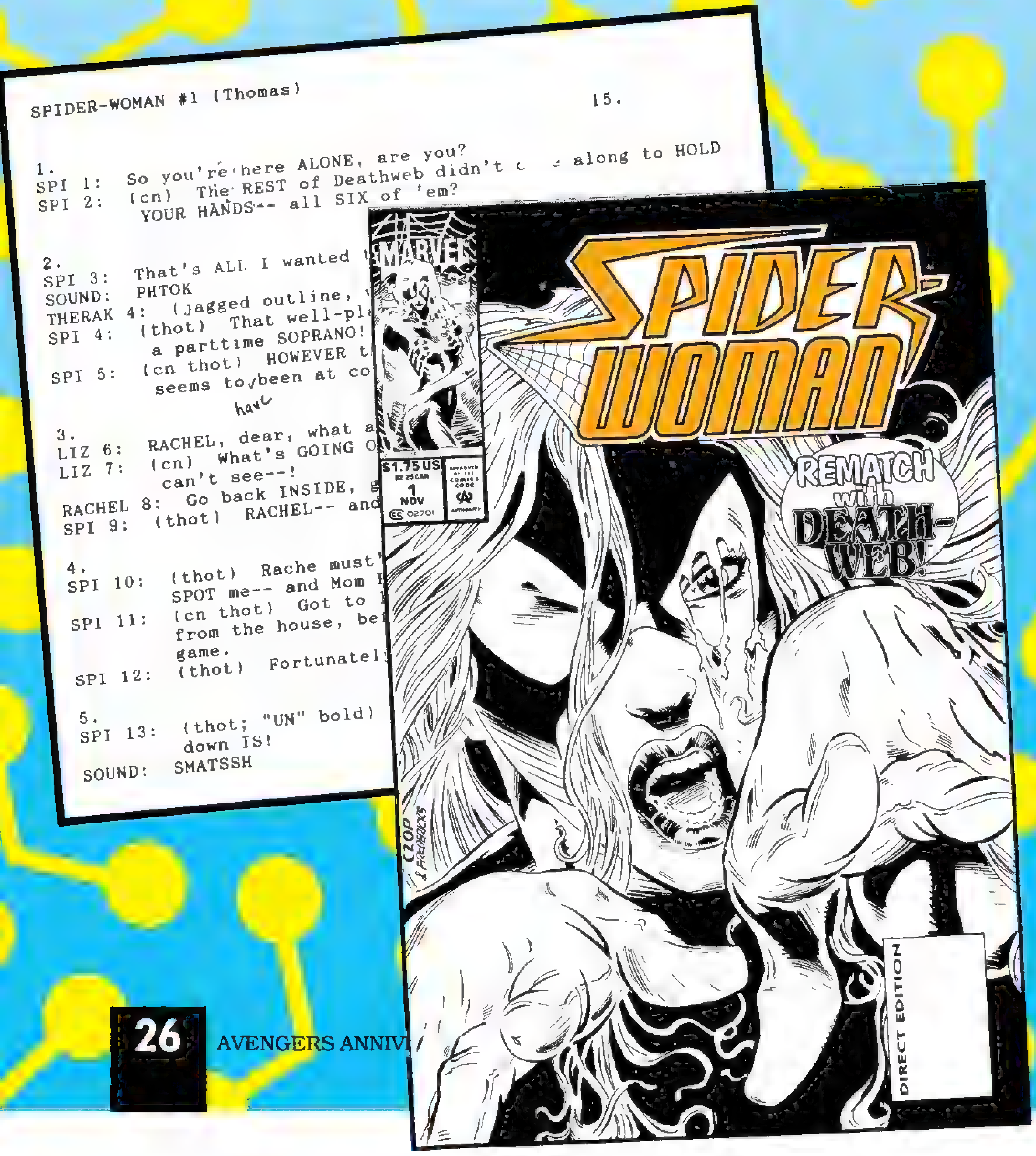
Creative, experienced, and disciplined — all aptly describe writer Roy Thomas and his thirty year career in comic books.

Entering the field via an independent comic book fanzine, *Alter Ego*, Roy worked there as an assistant editor from 1961 to 1964, then became editor in 1965. His efforts caught the attention of Editor Mort Weisinger at DC Comics. After contacting Roy in Jackson, Missouri, Mort offered Roy a job, which he graciously accepted and relocated to New York City. Two weeks later, Stan Lee met Roy and counter-offered him an on-staff writing position at Marvel Comics.

For the next fifteen years, Roy worked almost exclusively for Marvel. Scripting such titles as **MILLIE THE MODEL** and **PATSY AND HEDI**, Roy first delved into romance and light adventure comics. Shortly thereafter, he scripted various issues of **IRON MAN** and **DR. STRANGE** before landing a job as regular writer of **SGT. FURY AND HIS HOWLING COMMANDOS.** "On a majority of the books I began to write," Roy recalled, "I was the first writer to take over after Stan Lee. I took over **UNCANNY X-MEN** with issue **#20**, and later the **AVENGERS** with issue **#35**. It's always hard to follow a good act. Stan set new standards for comic book writing. It was a challenge to keep up his standards and ensure that they were the same characters he wrote."

In 1970, Roy played an instrumental role in bringing Conan the Barbarian to Marvel. With Stan's permission, Roy contacted the estate of Robert E. Howard, Conan creator and author, and within the year, Roy was hard at work bringing Conan to life in the pages of **CONAN THE BARBARIAN**. "Barry (Windsor) Smith was the first artist, when it was originally supposed to be John Buscema," Roy reveals. "The publisher decided they were paying a lot of money for the Conan rights and they would save money by hiring Barry over John. John was too expensive." During his last few issues of **CONAN**, Roy acquired a collaborator — his wife, Dannette Thomas. "Dann started helping me co-plot about thirteen years ago. She's not someone who grew up reading comics. Her ideas can be really innovative." Now that the original Conan series is coming to a close, Roy has been slated to relaunch Conan in the new title: **CONAN THE ADVENTURER**, which takes Conan back to his younger days.

Reflecting on his career, Roy is amazed at how much — and how little — things have changed. "I think in some ways, you're fresher when you start. Then, of course, you learn more as you go, use techniques that you've acquired. But writing comics in general has changed, along with the comics field. Originally, I imitated Stan Lee's way of writing, which was a little more melodramatic, less realistic. I haven't deliberately set out to make any style changes. Some books I write lighter than I used to, others I write as I always have. You change over a period of years. You're a little less young, maybe a little less close to your audience's age, but you still have the same interest in adventure and fantasy."



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SPIDER-WOMAN #1 (Thomas)                                  15.

1.
SPI 1:   So you're here ALONE, are you?
SPI 2:   (cn)  The REST of Deathweb didn't c [illegible] along to HOLD
            YOUR HANDS-- all SIX of 'em?

2.
SPI 3:   That's ALL I wanted
SOUND:   PHTOK
THERAK 4:   (jagged outline,
SPI 4:   (thot)  That well-pl
            a parttime SOPRANO!
SPI 5:   (cn thot)  HOWEVER t
            seems to been at co
                  have

3.
LIZ 6:   RACHEL, dear, what a
LIZ 7:   (cn)  What's GOING O
            can't see--!
RACHEL 8:   Go back INSIDE, g
SPI 9:   (thot)  RACHEL-- and

4.
SPI 10:   (thot)  Rache must
             SPOT me-- and Mom
SPI 11:   (cn thot)  Got to
             from the house, be
             game.
SPI 12:   (thot)  Fortunatel

5.
SPI 13:   (thot; "UN" bold)
             down IS!
SOUND:   SMATSSH
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THE AVENGERS® CHARTER

LEGACY OF LEGENDS

KIRBY •
ADKINS •

BE IT KNOWN…

That we, the Avengers, have banded together to protect and safeguard the Planet Earth, its inhabitants and resources, from any and all threats — terrestrial or otherwise — which are, or might proves to be, beyond the power of conventional forces to handle.

That we shall brook no interference in the growth of mankind in meeting its rightful destiny.

That we dedicate ourselves to the establishment, growth, and preservation of peace, liberty, equality, and justice under law.

This is our solemn oath.

With those fateful words, and the charter that followed them, the Avengers took their place as Earth's foremost Super-Team — a *professional* team.

"The Avengers are the pre-eminent team in the Marvel Universe," Executive Editor Mark Gruenwald explained. "The team with the most respectability, the greatest mystique — they're not just playing games!

"These are beings with *very* high standards of behavior — and those are the standards they set forth in their charter," he continued. "The founders, Iron Man, Thor, Wasp, Ant Man, even the Hulk, saw the Avengers as more than just a team. It was also a sort of legacy — something that would continue beyond their involvement."

"Something that would live beyond them."

"The Charter was a way to put their principles down on paper, pass them along to future generations of Avengers." He laughed. "Of course, in the *real* world, there were other reasons for its creation. At story conferences, questions kept coming up about how the Avengers operated. We'd always spend time talking about what the group would do in certain situations, when would they call in the Fantastic Four, for example, or when would they decide they needed substitutes.

"The Charter was a way to put their principles down on paper..."

"It was all a question of SOP's (Standard Operating Procedures), something all big groups have in place as a matter of course. Roger Stern (then writer of the **AVENGERS**) decided to spell them out, get them on paper as a sort of speculation, and what he did became the original Avengers charter."

Roger Stern remembered it a little differently: "It's been so long, but I remember that Mark (Gruenwald) gave me a lot of notes to build on — he *asked* me to do it. I'd just taken over as regular scripter on **THE AVENGERS**, and there was an annual in the works. They wanted to run a feature on the Charter in the back — it was time to spell things out. Mark had already done a lot of research into the thing, so I took his notes and added *my* two cents."

He went on: "You see, any organization, for various legal purposes, *has* to have a charter that sets out their goals — what they intend to do. The specifics of how those goals are to be met are spelled out in the bylaws. That's what the piece in the **AVENGERS** ANNUAL was to be about. So I took Mark's notes, added in what I knew of Avengers history, and the details the charter would need to work, and ... there it was!

"It allows the Avengers to be recognized as a legally-founded organization, for purposes of cooperating with other, established, law-enforcement organizations: the New York Police Department, Interpol, the FBI — not to mention dealing with governments, the United Nations, whoever."

Of course, as time passed, the Avengers, and the world they live in, changed, until ...

"There's a new charter now," Gruenwald noted, "one that internationalizes the team. It's all Larry Hama's doing."

"When Larry came in to write **THE AVENGERS**, he decided that the old charter didn't really make sense in terms of the scope of Avenger operations. The team seemed to be doing things entirely undreamed of in their charter. Larry thought it would be a good idea to change the charter, update it, especially in the areas the group's adventures were leading them into. He saw differences between the activities that were going on and what the charter said were *supposed* to go on — and they bothered him."

"That's right," Larry Hama confirmed. "There are things in comics that impinge on the real world, and when they're wrong, that just bothers me. As a writer, I ask questions: How can these guys just go across a border and do this stuff? Are they liable to lawsuits? That kind of thing. When I took the **AVENGERS**, I asked to see the charter, and found that a lot of it was kind of outdated. So here I was, working on the seventh or eighth reorganization of the Avengers, and I had all this stuff that already existed on paper, but a lot of it was useless for various weird political reasons.

"There are things in comics that impinge on the real world, and when they're wrong, that just bothers me."

"After all, what's the use of having all these powers if you can't, say, cross the border into Canada?" he questioned.

"So I figured we should revise the charter, change it so it fit into the *real* world," (he laughed) "if the real world had people who could fly and have beams come out of their eyes!"

"I wrote this backstory," Hama continued. "Which basically said that in secret arms limitations talks between the

US and the Soviet Union, the Avengers were used as a bargaining chip. After all, they *were* a very powerful force administered by America's National Security Council and were getting special privileges from the Federal Government.

> "After all, what's the use of having all these powers if you can't, say, cross the border into Canada?"

"So in this agreement, the US government disentangled themselves from the Avengers — leaving them on their own."

"Two days after the announcement, the Avengers are approached by a special committee of the United Nations, and offered a deal — if the Avengers charter is amended to allow for an international membership, the U.N. will 'adopt' the Avengers as a special unit of its peacekeeping force," Hama elaborated.

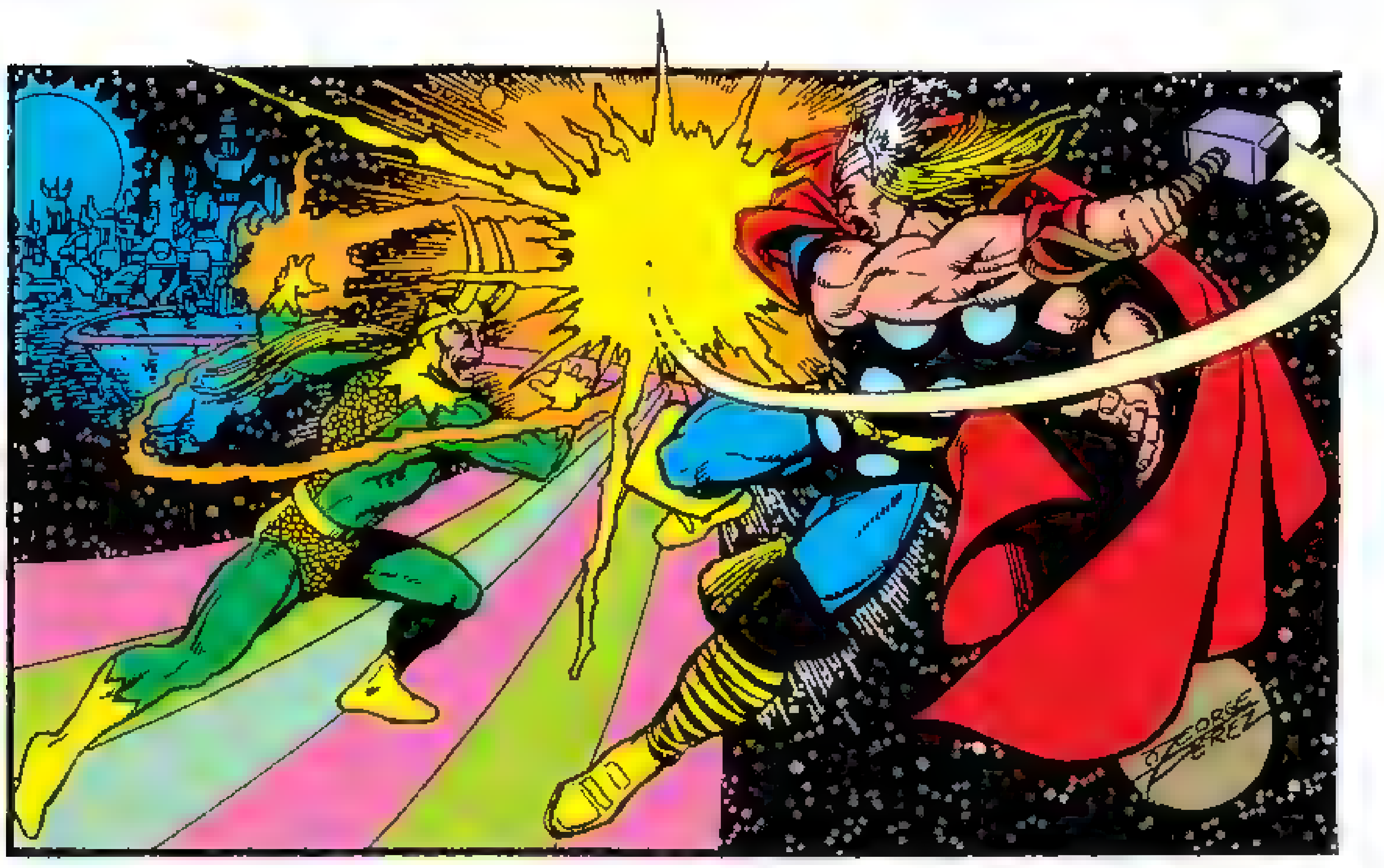
"All this let us internationalize things, so that characters who weren't American Citizens and so on and so forth could become members."

And what about the fact that some members of the Avengers are gods?

"Well," Hama quickly points out. "The thing is, they're not. At least, not gods as we think of them."

He pauses, thinking. "Gods in the Marvel Universe are quote — small "g" gods — unquote. They are beings of a different plane, rather then deities who depend on worship to exist. Son of Satan is *not* the Devil, Mephistopheles is *not* Lucifer the fallen Angel, the Demons who exist in the Marvel Universe are not part of the Judeo-Christian cosmos."

He paused again. "And, of course, the thing about the elder Norse and Hellenic Gods, is that they were a *lot* more human and approachable than the Judeo-Christian God. They interacted with humanity, they had *kids* with humans! They had *very* human faults. And they weren't pre-ordaining stuff, it just happened! It's not as if those guys were causing things to happen. In a way it's wrong to call them Gods. From our cultural standpoint — it's a misnomer!"



So, Thor and Hercules weren't a problem in logic — but why work so hard to rewrite the charter?

"The Charter is *important* to the Avengers," Hama was quick to point out. "It makes them something more than just vigilantes. That is its main purpose — it ensures against the Avengers being just a group of total civilians operating outside the law.

"When we amended the charter to handle that, to take care of those basic needs, giving the Avengers a certain amount of deputorial power and the ability to exercise it *wherever* it was needed, my main worries were resolved. But in reading and working on the charter, I discovered other things that I needed to clear up," he continued, "like the way reserve Avengers were handled (Section 2, Paragraph D, Clause 3, part a).

"The whole thing about subbing is taken from union charters — for example, in the musicians union, if you can't show up for a job, you have to provide a substitute, but once you provide that substitute, assuming he shows up and does the job, there's nothing they can do to you! A lot of unions work that way."

He explained, "I figured the Avengers should work in the same way. It adds another level of responsibility, makes every member more responsible to the team. I guess, basically, I see the charter as a *deus ex machina* device. Its origins had to be vague enough that it could cover all those things — it's basically a cover, rather than a solid document, although I did have a *real* charter in front of me when I did it — I can't remember whose it was, but it was a real document. I took that, and combined it with the old charter and made changes and added addendum. There are new rules about quorums and substitutes and things, but it's basically the same document.

"And now, at least *I'm* comfortable with it."

Larry may be comfortable, but the Avengers, and their charter, have never stood still. They've grown, and matured, through their years of service. And today...

"Well, of course," Mark Gruenwald reminded, "Larry is no longer on the book, and I don't know how the new team is treating the charter. I don't really know if they're using it or considering it or not. Maybe there'll be a new charter with the new team — it's too early to tell."

Old, new, still unwritten, the Avengers charter, like the Avengers themselves, continues to move forward. Molded to the changing world, the charter allows the Avengers to evolve, yet still maintain a link to their glorious past. It is a living document — one that reflects the life of the world — and the team, around it.

Doug Murray, co-creator of The 'Nam, *has been covering the fantasy/science-fiction/comics beat ever since his early days with* Famous Monsters of Filmland. *He is a regular contributor to* MARVEL AGE *and various special magazine projects. His other Marvel credits include MERC, THE WAR, and the HEARTS AND MINDS graphic novel.*

THE AVENGERS CHARTER

ARTICLE ONE: ORGANIZATION

The Avengers is hereby chartered as a peace-keeping force of the security arm of the United Nations answerable only to the Security Council.

Headquarters shall be in New York City and there shall be established facilities for the use of the Avengers in the current eleven member nations of the Security Council.

ARTICLE TWO: JURISDICTION

The Avengers, as a group, are enpowered to act as an agency of enforcement on duly recognized and approved missions in all lands, territories and protectorates of member states of the United Nations, providing that the threat in question is super-powered, extra-terrestrial, extra-dimensional, sub-terranean, sub-oceanic, or occult, and engaged in an invasion, infestation, limited incursion, piracy, enchantment or any flagrant violation of international law not instigated, sanctioned, or abetted by a member nation.

ARTICLE THREE: FUNDING

Major funding for the major operations of the Avengers—for upkeep of the New York headquarters, transportation, and equipment shall be provided by a grant from the Maria Stark Foundation—Anthony Stark, Director—with the understanding that the Foundation shall have no say in Avengers operations, policy, membership or the deployment of funds within the Avengers organization.

The stipends to serving members and active and inactive reserve members shall be drawn from the major pool of United Nations funding.

Costs for construction, maintenance, and staffing of subsidiary headquarters shall be absorbed by the host countries.

ARTICLE FOUR: OPERATIONS

The day-to-day operations of the Avengers shall be governed by a set of bylaws as put forth by the founding members.

AVENGERS bylaws

SECTION ONE: POLICY AND OPERATIONS

- **A:** All Avengers shall, at all times, endeavor to adhere to the principles of the Avengers Charter and follow the rules and regulations of these bylaws.
  - **1.** The bylaws may be amended, when necessary, by the active members of the Avengers. Amendments may be proposed by any active Avenger. Amendments shall become a binding part of these bylaws upon approval by two-thirds of the active membership.
    - **1a.** Active membership shall be further defined to mean the seven serving members of the primary team and their seven specific reserve substitutes.
- **B.** No Avenger shall be required to surrender knowledge of his or her civilian identity or personal affairs to the membership at large or the United Nations Security Council.
- **C.** The Avengers shall be led by a duly elected chairbeing. It shall be the duty of this leader to coordinate all Avenger activities whether business or tactical in nature.
  - **1.** The position of Chairbeing shall be open to any active member who has passed his/her probationary period (see Section Two—Membership).
  - **2.** The Chairbeing shall serve for a term of one year, with no limit to the number of successive terms a leader may serve.
  - **3.** It shall be a privilege of the Chairbeing to determine the format of meetings and to call special meetings as he/she sees fit.
  - **4.** In the event of the absence, incapacity or resignation of the Chairbeing, an interim leader shall be chosen by a two-thirds vote of the active membership.
  - **5.** In the event of incapacity or death during action, chairbeingship shall pass in orderly succession among the primary team in a predetermined chain of command arrived at by majority vote among the primary team.

SECTION TWO: MEMBERSHIP

- **A.** Recognizing that the membership of the Avengers may be subject to, and, indeed, might profit from change, procedures for the addition of members shall be set forth.
- **B.** Candidates for membership in the Avengers must be legal adults, possessing at least one skill, power, ability, or talent which is deemed valuable by a majority of the active membership.
  - **1.** Membership shall not be denied on account of race, color, creed, sex, or condition of birth or origin.
  - **2.** Candidates for membership must be nominated by one active member in good standing at a regular or special meeting. Election for membership must be held within one week of nomination and be attended by a simple majority of active members. A two-thirds vote is necessary for election to membership.
  - **3.** Newly-elected Avengers shall serve a probationary period of not less than six months.
    - **a.** During the probationary period, a special committee consisting of one primary team member, one reserve substitute, and two members of the Avengers support crews shall investigate the candidate's public record for any violations, breaches of trust, or depredations, legal or moral, which may preclude said candidate from assumption of full active status.
    - **b.** While on probation, the new Avenger shall have limited access to Avengers facilities and records.
    - **c.** At the end of probation, the new Avenger shall assume full active status, unless objections are raised by any active member, or by the United Nations Security Council.
- **C.** The Avengers shall select new members whenever the Chairbeing or two-thirds of the active membership determines that the ranks are not at optimal strength, or when there is a vacancy in the ranks.
  - **1.** It shall be the prerogative of the Chairbeing to limit the number of active members.
- **D.** Active Avengers shall be the designation given to those Avengers who are full-time members.
  - **1.** Active Avengers shall be required to log all individual cases into the main computer file, that the entire membership may benefit from the individual's experience.
  - **2.** Active Avengers shall be required to attend all regular business meetings. Members who miss more than one meeting per month without submitting an acceptable excuse may face suspension for a period to be determined by a consensus of the other active members. (See Paragraph G)
  - **3.** Active Avengers shall be issued an Avengers identification card and an emergency signal device.

  a. Active Avengers shall be required to meet all CALLS TO ASSEMBLE. If unable to respond, the active Avenger must notify that specific member's reserve substitute. Failure to respond coupled with failure to notify the reserve substitute is grounds for immediate suspension of privileges and must be dealt with by a tribunal of all active members.

  b. Active members who miss an emergency call without good reason may be subject to disciplinary action.

4. Active Avengers shall be expected to cooperate with other law enforcement agencies. Although granted certain legal immunities by the Avengers priority clearance, no Avenger shall be considered above the law.

5. Active Avengers shall be paid a stipend of one thousand dollars ($1000) per week. Members may choose not to accept their stipends, in which case the money shall be placed into their retirement fund.

  a. Active members shall be entitled to free medical and life insurance benefits.

  b. Active members shall be provided with private quarters where they, if so choosing, may reside. Unlimited meal privileges shall be provided for live-in members.

6. Active Avengers shall be granted unlimited access to the Avengers Mansion headquarters, vehicles, computer records files, and any other facilities of the organization.

7. Active Avengers shall, at all times, act in a manner befitting that of a guardian of the public trust.

E. Reserve Avengers shall be the designation given to those Avengers who are part-time members, on call for special missions or emergency assignments only.

1. Reserve membership shall be limited to those members who have fulfilled an active term of duty of not less than one year, and who wish to cut back their connections with the group.

2. Reserve Avengers shall not be required to log their individual cases, though they shall be encouraged to do so.

3. Reserve Avengers may attend any regular meeting, but shall be required to attend no more than one per year.

4. Reserve Avengers shall retain their Avengers identification card and emergency signal device.

  a. Reserve members may be demoted to inactive status if they fail to answer three consecutive emergency calls.

5. Reserve Avengers shall be paid a stipend of one hundred dollars ($100) per month.

6. Reserve Avengers shall have limited access to Avengers Mansion, files, equipment, etc.

7. Reserve Avengers may return to active status at the discretion of the Chairbeing, if they so petition and are accepted by majority vote of the active members.

8. Reserve Avengers shall be given priority over new candidates in the filling of vacancies in the active membership.

9. Reserve Avengers may retire to inactive status by notifying the Chairbeing and surrendering the Avengers identification card and emergency signal device.

10. Reserve Avengers shall not have a vote in Avengers proceedings.

11. Reserve Avengers shall have the authority to call emergency meetings.

F. Inactive Avenger shall be the designation given to any member who has retired or resigned from active and reserve duty.

1. Any Avenger may resign by simply notifying the Chairbeing of his/her intent and surrendering his/her Avengers identification card, emergency signal device, and any other Avengers-owned equipment.

2. Any active or reserve Avenger who is incapacitated or who moves from the organization's normal jurisdiction shall be granted an honorable discharge and placed on the inactive roster.

3. Inactive Avengers may be granted limited access to Avengers equipment and facilities only at the discretion of the active members.

4. Inactive status shall be considered the same as an indefinite leave of absence.

5. Inactive Avengers may be reinstated only if there is a vacancy in the active ranks, and then only if elected by a two-thirds vote of the active membership.

G. Motions for disciplinary action against any active or reserve Avenger may be brought by any other active Avenger.

1. In the event of such an accusation, the Chairbeing shall convene a board of inquiry, comprising a simple majority of the active membership (minus the accuser, if he/she is an active member).

2. Disciplinary action shall be limited to suspension, with the option of further trying the accused before a tribunal of all active members.

  a. Tribunal processing shall be conducted in the manner of a military court-martial.

  b. Maximum punishment to be brought on the accused by such a tribunal shall be expulsion from the Avengers.

  c. A two-thirds vote shall be necessary to expel a member from the Avengers.

3. Active and reserve Avengers may be expelled, with no possibility of reinstatement, on the following grounds:

  a. Conviction for any crime above a misdemeanor.

  b. Deliberate betrayal of Avengers classified information.

  c. Criminal acts of negligence not convicted for, but witnessed by at least one active member.

SECTION THREE: MEETINGS

A. The Avengers shall meet regularly, at least once a week, at a time and place to be agreed upon by a simple majority of the active membership.

B. Emergency meetings may be called at any time, but emergency meetings shall not be considered a replacement for a regular meeting.

C. In the event that an Avenger mission is in progress at the time of a regularly-scheduled meeting, the meeting will be rescheduled.

D. A simple majority of the active membership shall be required to make a meeting official.

SECTION FOUR: PUNISHMENT OF CRIMINALS

A. Avengers shall leave the punishment of perpetrators of criminal activity to the appropriate agencies of the law.

B. The Avengers shall not abridge an accused's right to a fair and speedy trial.

C. The Avengers shall abide by the decisions of the law, and will not take upon themselves any aspect of the punishment process.

D. In the event that conventional imprisonment proves inadequate for a given criminal, the Avengers shall be allowed to hold said criminals in a manner they see fit, provided that a full report of said method of imprisonment is given to the proper law enforcement authorities.

SECTION FIVE: AFFILIATIONS

The Avengers shall maintain open and reciprocal relations—including joint limited access to computer data—with the Fantastic Four, Inc. and the Supreme Headquarters International Espionage Law-Enforcement Division.

SECTION SIX: SECURITY

All Avenger files shall be open to the scrutiny of a special watchdog committee of the United Nations Security Council and no Avenger may refuse to answer any question posed by a member of that committee, other than those that would reveal that member's secret identity or compromise the security of that member's native country.

SECTION SEVEN: DISCORPORATION

The Avengers organization may be disbanded only by order of the United Nations Security Council for a breach of International Security, or by unanimous vote of the entire active membership of the Avengers. In the event of disbanding, all Avengers properties and facilities shall revert to the Maria Stark Foundation and/or Stark International with the exception of any devices, properties, analysis systems, or data which have any bearing on U.N. Security. Said materials and data shall be immediately turned over to the United Nations Security Council.

PRO FILES

— Jaye Gardner

Ross Dzon

Creative teams don't *always* work well together. In fact, it can be rather difficult to find compatible pencilers and inkers.

That isn't the case for **AVENGERS WEST COAST** penciler Dave Ross and inker Tim Dzon. They have been working together for nearly 30 issues, a feat almost unheard of in the comics field today. Together, they have brought the **AVENGERS WEST COAST** to new levels of recognition.

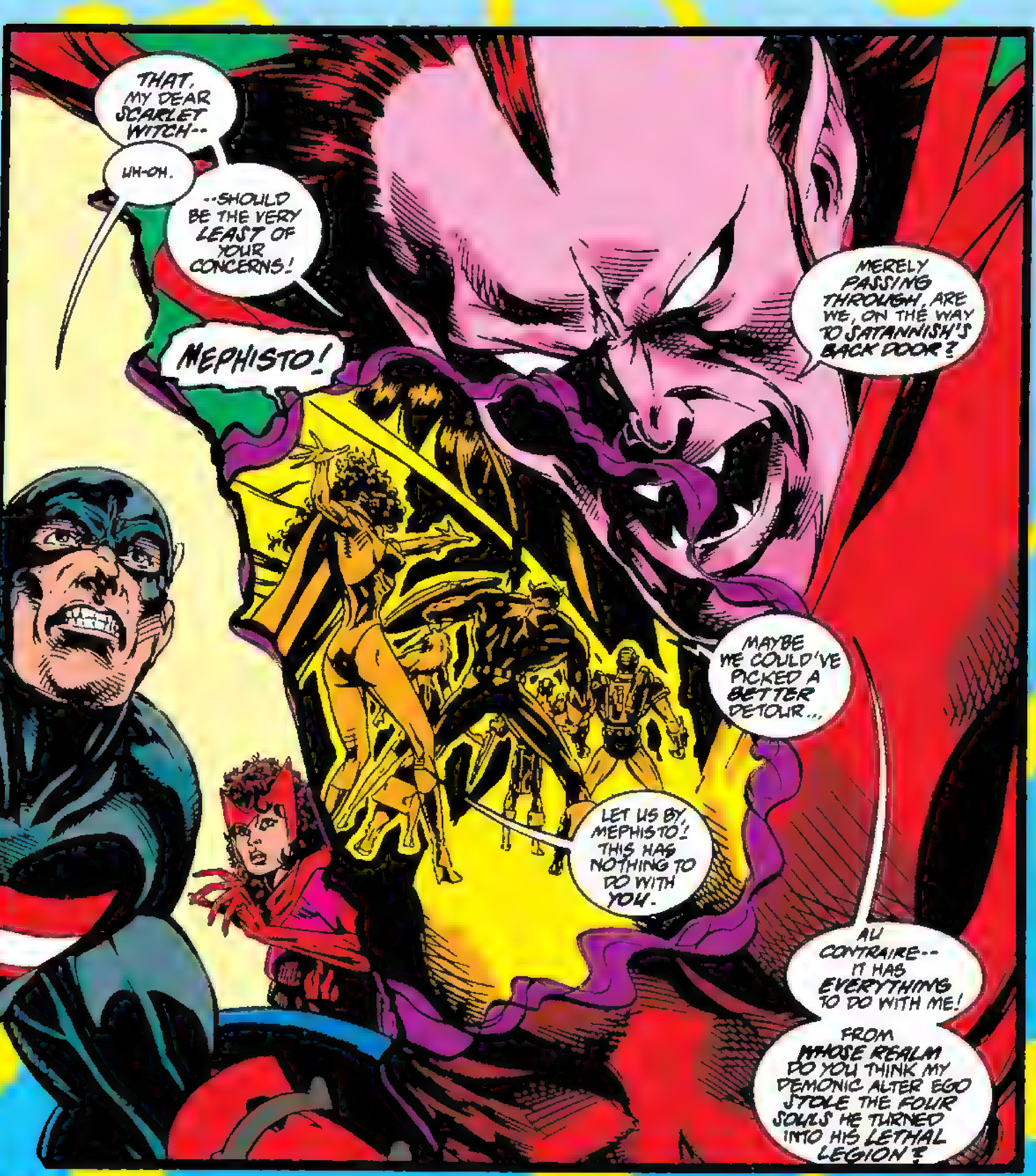
Attending Sheridan College, one of two illustrious animation schools in North America, Dave set his sights on a career in film animation. His first brush with success was working on the feature film *Rock 'n Rule* for Canada's Nelvana Animation in 1980. In the following years, Dave swayed away from animation and toward illustration, extrapolating information from Andrew Loomis's *Figure Drawing*. Dave quickly learned the fundamentals of drawing and illustration. To this day, he still praises the merits of Loomis's book and recommends it to anyone interested in penciling.

Before landing his first full time assignment on **ALPHA FLIGHT** after John Byrne left, he worked with writer Roy Thomas for the first time on *Last Days of the Justice Society* for DC Comics. Coincidently, once again it was departures, of John Byrne then Paul Ryan, which provided Dave with his successful run on **AVENGERS WEST COAST**. "Paul called me up when he knew that he was leaving the book and suggested that I talk to Roy Thomas and Editor Howard Mackie, so I did. The rest is history," according to Dave.

The only difficulty Dave finds with penciling comics is learning how to condense. "Sometimes, you have to condense and edit plots yourself. You have to prune them down, then get approval from your writer and editor. What I learned at Sheridan is, 'if you have to prune anything, start with whatever doesn't advance the plot.'"

Tim Dzon, on the other hand, doesn't need to worry about pruning down the plot. He is more concerned with consistency and keeping in tune with Dave's pencils. "Dave and I aren't trying to emulate any of the 'hot' artists," Tim pointed out. "We want to be noted for our own individual style rather than the imitation of someone else's. My style lives off the feedback and response of editors, pencilers, other inkers, and even the fans. I believe art is a changing medium, and never stagnant. Feedback is always good to receive."

Dave and Tim are very happy with their run on **AVENGERS WEST COAST**. They, along with Roy Thomas, have taken the Avengers to the forefront of super heroism and delved into the minds of innovative characters like U.S.Agent and Spider-Woman. Before their run is over, some very astonishing events will occur. "The current storyline is really exciting," admitted Tim. "A lot is going to happen before the series ends, like the 100th issue and the death of one of the characters. It's the stuff fans should really go for."

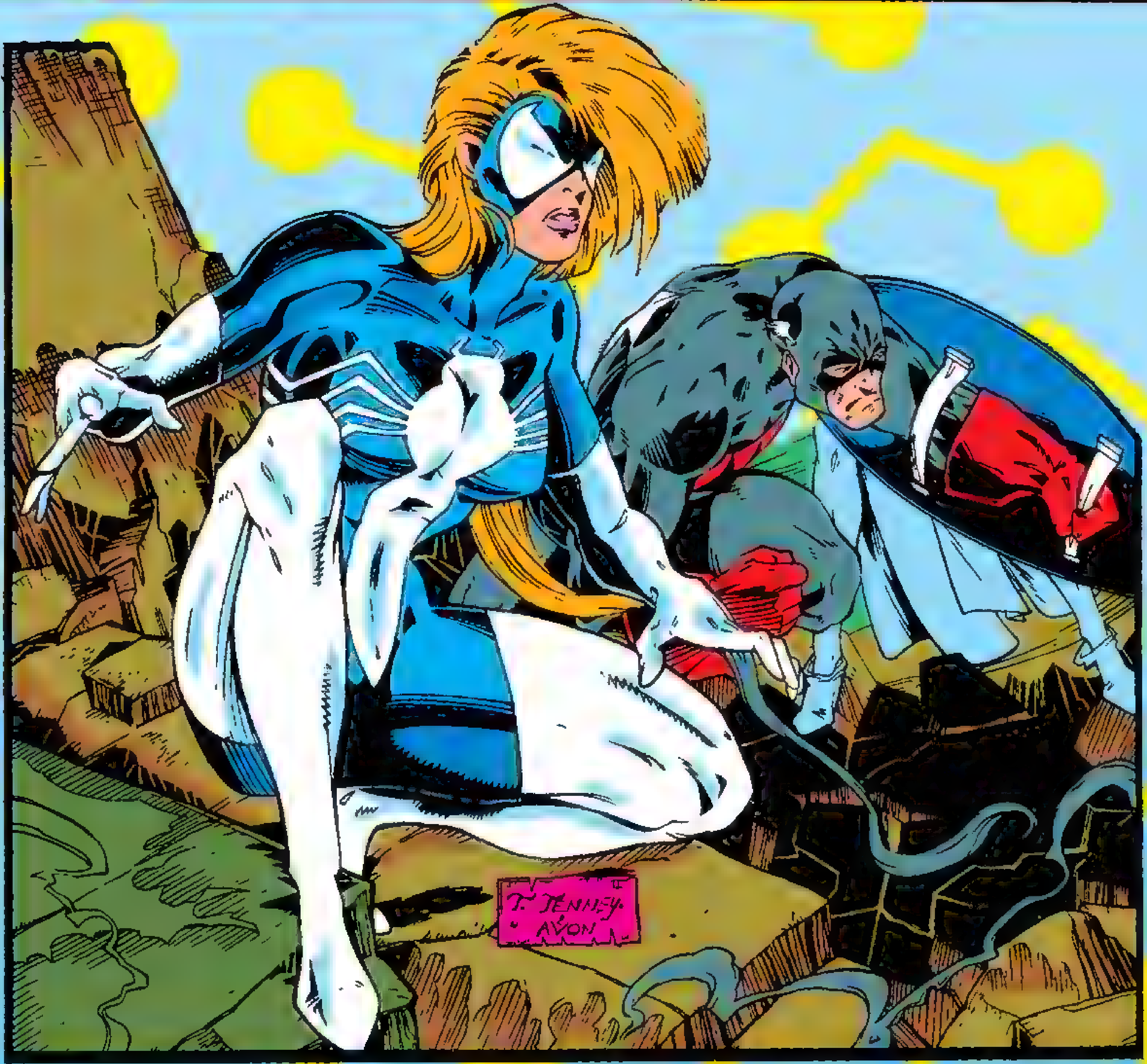

THAT, MY DEAR SCARLET WITCH--
UH-OH.
--SHOULD BE THE VERY LEAST OF YOUR CONCERNS!
MEPHISTO!
MERELY PASSING THROUGH, ARE WE, ON THE WAY TO SATANNISH'S BACK DOOR?
MAYBE WE COULD'VE PICKED A BETTER DETOUR...
LET US BY, MEPHISTO! THIS HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH YOU.
AU CONTRAIRE-- IT HAS EVERYTHING TO DO WITH ME!
FROM WHOSE REALM DO YOU THINK MY DEMONIC ALTER EGO STOLE THE FOUR SOULS HE TURNED INTO HIS LETHAL LEGION?

PRO FILES

Force Works Team

— Jaye Gardner

Sometimes, good things *do* come to an end, and sometimes, an ending is only the beginning. **AVENGERS WEST COAST** is canceled with issue #102, but Iron Man, Scarlet Witch, Spider-Woman, and U.S.Agent aren't going to roll over and play dead. In fact, they will have much more of an "in your face" attitude as they head up a new group called **FORCE WORKS**, courtesy of writers Andy Lanning and Dan Abnett, and debuting penciler Thomas Tenney.



FORCE WORKS isn't the first time Andy and Dan have collaborated on a project together. The first time was the highly successful "Eurohit" saga in the pages of **THE PUNISHER**. Response was so phenomenal that they decided to collaborate on other projects like Epic's **MUTATIS**, the **SCARLET WITCH** Limited Series, and Marvel UK's **BATTLETIDE: DEATH'S HEAD II vs. KILLPOWER**.

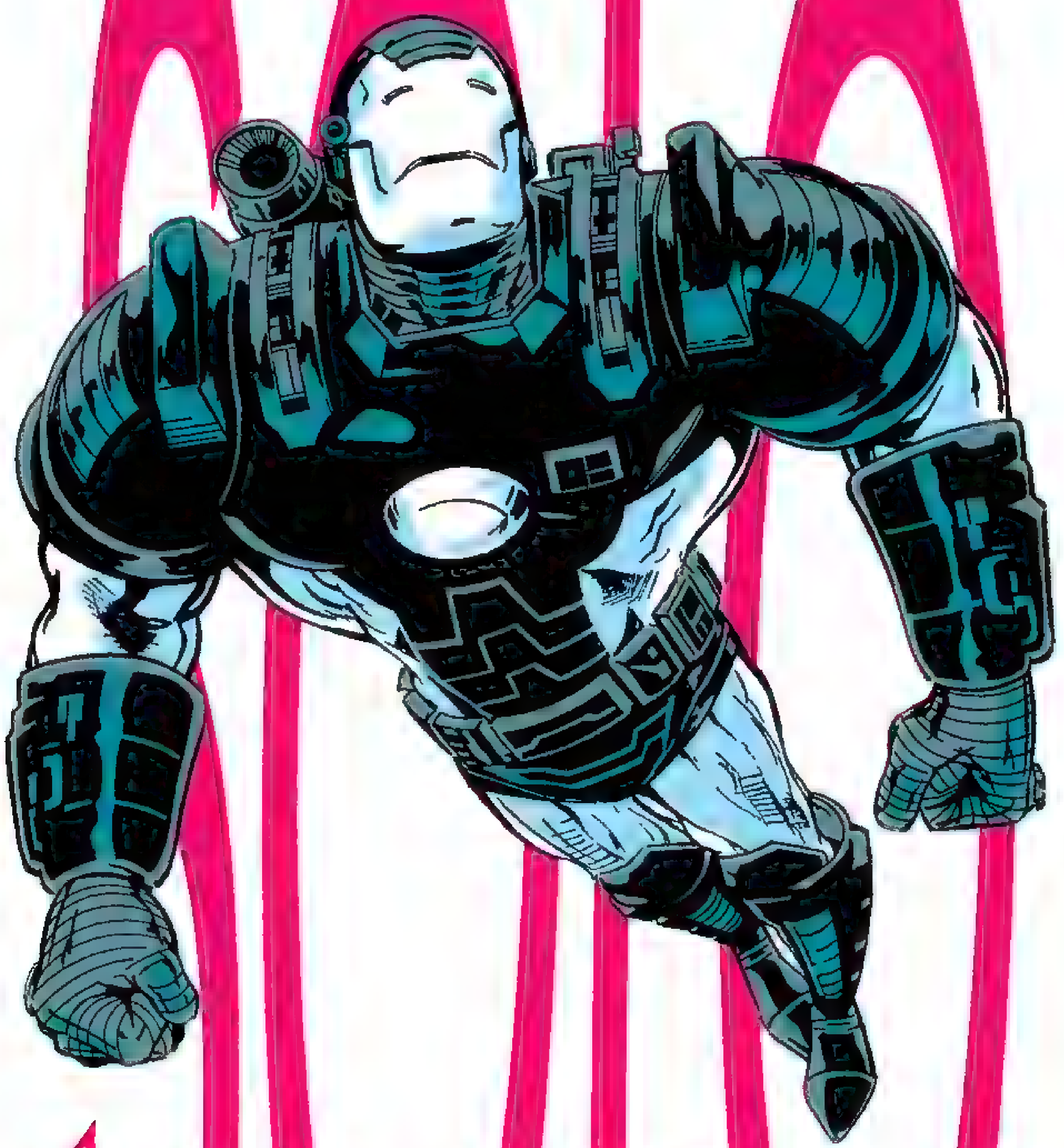
"Initially, we talk things through in a very animated fashion and bang out story ideas," Dan recalled. "Then, we have a much more in depth and complicated conversation for which we take notes and map out plot structure. This is all recorded on scribble bits of paper, then typed up. I tend to dialogue the end results. Andy has a tendency to produce stronger plots. He initiates a project and I finish it off."

Andy's strong sense of storytelling originates from his artistic background. Having penciled "cartoony" books such as **GHOSTBUSTERS** and **SLEEZE BROTHERS**, he prefers inking much more. He is currently the regular inker over Salvador LaRoca on **DEATH'S HEAD II**, and is inking over Bryan Hitch on a Punisher/ Death's Head II bookshelf comic. "I enjoy inking the most," Andy admitted. "I get to go further with it than if I were penciling, because of my cartoony style. With writing, I tend to think in pitches and sequences. I tend to be the whirlwind ideas person and leave the scripting to Dan."

Rounding out the **FORCE WORKS** team is penciling newcomer Thomas Tenney. Previously working on **ROBOTECH** for Comico and **TERMINATOR** for Now Comics, Thomas took a two year leave of absence from comics to work for **SFX** (Sports and Fantasy Extra) magazine as an art director and, later, editor. Thomas attributes his comeback to a meeting with artist Gene Colan at a comic convention. Thomas recalled, "I showed Gene my work and he showed me direction. He gave me a new outlook within the industry and sparked my interest back up. He's the best tour guide anyone could have." Thomas is back and with a vengeance, which is more than appropriate to **FORCE WORKS**. "I'm trying to approach the book in the same way Frank Miller approached **DAREDEVIL**. I'm trying to make this a moodier book, including a lot of emotion, a lot of power in terms of characterization and interpretation, evening out the art with the story itself. It's like, 'here are the Avengers that would kick down the door. Now here are the Avengers that will kick down the door and make you eat it!'"

Both Andy and Dan agreed that **FORCE WORKS** appeals to them because of its harder edged anti-hero qualities. The group decides to not simply react to violence but try to prevent it before it's begun. Through *force*, these ex-Avengers *work* under a different code of ethics, and given Dan and Andy's affinity for characters like the Punisher and Death's Head II, and Thomas's crisp and powerful pencils, **FORCE WORKS** couldn't be in better hands.

SOLO AVENGERS



Earth's Mightiest Heroes had better get ready to put some added oomph into their traditional "Avengers Assemble!" rallying cry. As the group's thirtieth anniversary celebration continues to gain momentum, developments in Avengers-related solo titles and limited series will further test the fiber and shake up the dynamic of this illustrious super hero cooperative. The bonds between Avengers teammates, always subject to swing wildly from rock solid to just plain rocky, are about to undergo some changes for the ages.

IRON MANIA

The Iron Man legend, also three decades old this year, stands to generate perhaps the farthest reaching shocks to the collective Avengers system. In the months ahead, Editor Nel Yomtov said, the recently disabled Tony Stark will rise from his sick bed, War Machine will escape Iron Man's shadow, and, as a combined result of both this storyline and the X-Men/Avengers crossover, the Avengers West Coast will emerge as a group literally reborn.

Writer Len Kaminski, penciler Kevin Hopgood, and inker Steve Mitchell kick off this chain of events with **IRON MAN #298**. Still controlling his armor telepathically, Tony Stark comes up against the new subterranean powerhouse Earthmover who, like the Mole Man, is a sympathetic antagonist in dire need of an attitude adjustment and a tan. Iron Man and Earthmover clash — jarringly — over which is the true threat to the West Coast's fragile crust, the probing by Stark's California geological stations or Earthmover's subsequent unfettered rampage.

As the plot builds toward issue #300, which will be a 64-page special replete with red and gold foil cover, Stark discovers that it is in fact his old thermal-powered nemesis Ultimo who has put California in jeopardy, and he's raring to give the Golden Avenger a pummeling as well. "The hollow suit of armor that Tony remote controls is totally destroyed, and in order to stop Ultimo, he realizes that he's got to get into some armor himself," Yomtov said. "He's not fully healed, but he has to have a go at this guy, because he is now all that stands in the way of the destruction of California."

In addition to donning new component-heavy armor which Yomtov described as "the most radical we've had in quite a while," the convalescing Stark will enlist several friends to strap on past Iron Man garb and fight at his side. The Shellhead squadron will include everyone from Stark's new CEO to longtime buddy Happy Hogan. "With all these suits of armor flying into battle, it's going to be a terrific visual book," Yomtov said.

At the same time, he added, the milestone special will serve an important logistical purpose: condensing 30 years of armor refinements, supporting cast changes, and other bits of Iron Man history into one issue. "New readers are going to feel as if they're coming aboard at ground zero."

While Tony Stark may finally be up and about, his estranged partner, James Rhodes, remains furious over the way Stark had earlier manipulated him and faked his own death. Following the anniversary issue, a climactic face-off will erupt between Iron Man and Rhodey as War Machine.

Stark emerges from this turn of events invigorated; when the disgruntled Avengers West Coast membership permanently splits from the charter group in the wake of the X-Men/Avengers crossover, Iron Man takes the initiative in shaping them into a new, more focused, more respected unit. (This transaction will be laid out for Marvel readers in **AVENGERS WEST COAST #102**, coming in November, and **FORCE WORKS #1**, due the following month.) Rhodey, meanwhile, walks away disgusted, setting the stage for the debut of his ongoing WAR MACHINE solo title.

Slated to kick off in January of '94 in a double-size issue with special cover treatment, the new series will be edited by Yomtov and co-written by Len Kaminski and Scott Benson (**IRON MAN ANNUAL '93**), with pencils by hot newcomer Gabriel Gecko.

Although the book is a spin-off, Yomtov acknowledged, it won't be an **IRON MAN** clone. "We will make **WAR MACHINE** as different from **IRON MAN** as we possibly can, yet still keep the ante up high on action-adventure," Yomtov said. "Rhodey and Tony Stark look at solutions to problems in very different ways," he continued. "Rhodey doesn't have the longtime associations with other super heroes that Tony Stark has, and he doesn't have the resources that Tony has. If his armor is damaged, he's going to have to put something together piecemeal to keep the suit up and running."

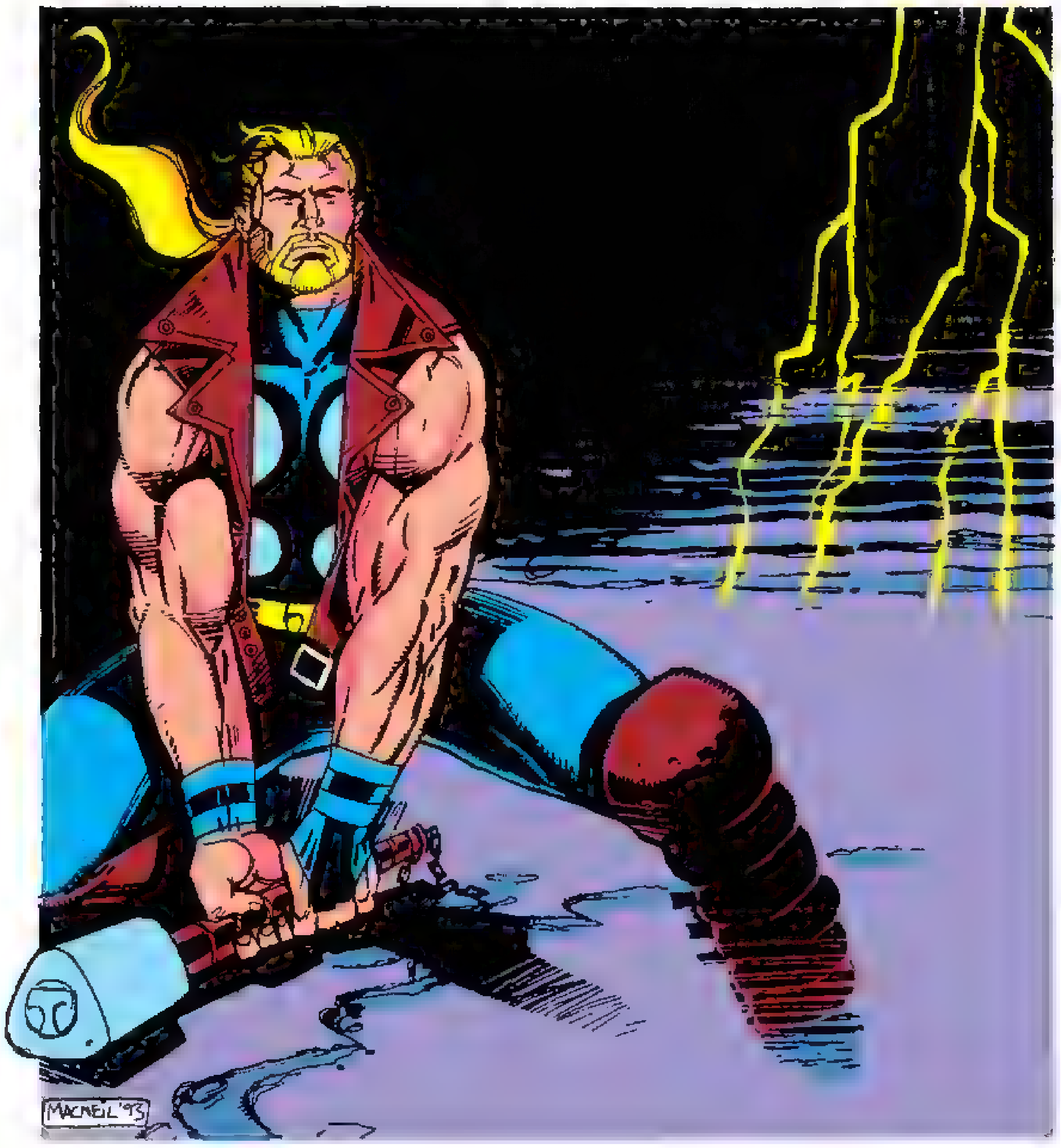
What Rhodey does possess is an especially keen awareness of the nigh-sacred quality of human rights, a character trait which will be fleshed out in the buildup to **WAR MACHINE #1**. "Rhodey keeps on saying, 'There's got to be more to this super hero business than beating up on guys in funny spandex costumes. I've got to be able to put this suit of armor and my intelligence to better use,'" Yomtov said.

Driven by this aim, the ominous-looking black-and-white clad hero hooks up with Worldwatch, a peacekeeping organization in the United Nations mold. In the book's opening four-part story arc, War Machine tackles an oppressive African military regime which has kidnapped Worldwatch leader Vincent Do'Qui, a friend of Rhodey's and a human rights activist on a level with Nelson Mandela.

Despite such subject matter, Yomtov stressed that **WAR MACHINE** won't weigh readers down with dry political moralizing. First issue guest stars Cable and Deathlok will no doubt help to establish the desired frenetic tone. "War Machine will be a real big part of the Marvel mainstream," Yomtov said. "It's just that the book isn't geared solely toward your run-of-the-mill super villains."

RUMBLINGS OF THUNDER

For literally a couple of generations, Thor, with his majestic bearing and lofty heroic discourse, embodied the grandeur that was the Avengers. But verily, these are the '90s, and just as the Avengers have evolved into a different group, the Thunderer legend has taken a marked turn toward the vernacular in the form of Eric Masterson. Joining teammates like Captain America as one of the Marvel Universe's elite, Eric recently premiered in his own monthly title, **THUNDERSTRIKE**, forging ahead with a hammer and heroic identity uniquely his own. The original thunderer, meanwhile, isn't just out of the Avengers loop — he's out of his mind.



Thor's woes are the result of the ambitious new storyline which got under way in **THOR #460**, the point at which Eric Masterson exited for **THUNDERSTRIKE** with creators Tom DeFalco, Ron Frenz, and Al Milgrom in tow. Applying their considerable psychological expertise, writer Ron Marz, penciler Bruce Zick, and inker Mike DeCarlo concluded that Thor's lengthy imprisonment within Eric's subconscious surely must have left him unhinged.

The Thunder God looks to continue on this track through the rest of the year, with his growing insanity reaching the critical point in a crossover encompassing multiple issues of **THOR**, **THE WARLOCK CHRONICLES**, **WARLOCK AND THE INFINITY WATCH**, and **THE SILVER SURFER**. This development will involve Thor's Avengers allies inasmuch as his nihilism poses a threat to the entire Marvel Universe.

> "The original thunderer. . .isn't just out of the Avengers loop — he's out of his mind."

Back on Midgard, Thunderstrike will be busy learning that the Juggernaut's destructive impulses are a bit more modest: he merely wants to pulverize one Eric Masterson. Following this second-issue blowout, scripter DeFalco, penciler Frenz, and inker Milgrom will shift the emphasis from heavyweight to heavy drama with a story focusing on the morality of vigilantism.

In this latter, hard-edged tale, Eric's son, Kevin, witnesses a schoolteacher's murder at the hands of a copycat Punisher. "Nobody knows why it happened," Frenz said, "but the suggestions start to lead toward the idea that there was a child pornography ring operating out of the school." Eric is so concerned about his son's well-being that when Sif turns up mid-story seeking his help in reasoning with Thor, he declines without a second thought.

Spider-Man swings into Thunderstrike's neighborhood in issue #4, an action fest which also weaves together the diverse paths of Code: Blue, **SHIELD**, and the sub-Manhattan Deviants of past *THOR* installments. With the emergence among the Deviants of a major new villain known as Komodon, Frenz said, "it's going to become apparent there's a war going on under New York City." Code: Blue heads below ground to investigate, only to be detained Big Brother-style for interfering in **SHIELD**'s jurisdiction.

"We're planning to do a nice big action story where Eric actually breaks Code: Blue out of the Helicarrier," Frenz promised.

Throughout these episodes, **THUNDERSTRIKE**'s creative team will continue to tease readers with mysterious hints about the identity of Bloodaxe. One supporting player will have to die to be cleared of suspicion. "We've tried to leave the door open for Bloodaxe being just about anybody," Frenz said. In fact, as long as Eric remains in possession of the blade, wrested away from his arch-enemy in the opening issue, not even he is completely immune to the weapon's dark temptations. Thor may not be the only unbalanced Marvel thunderer around.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

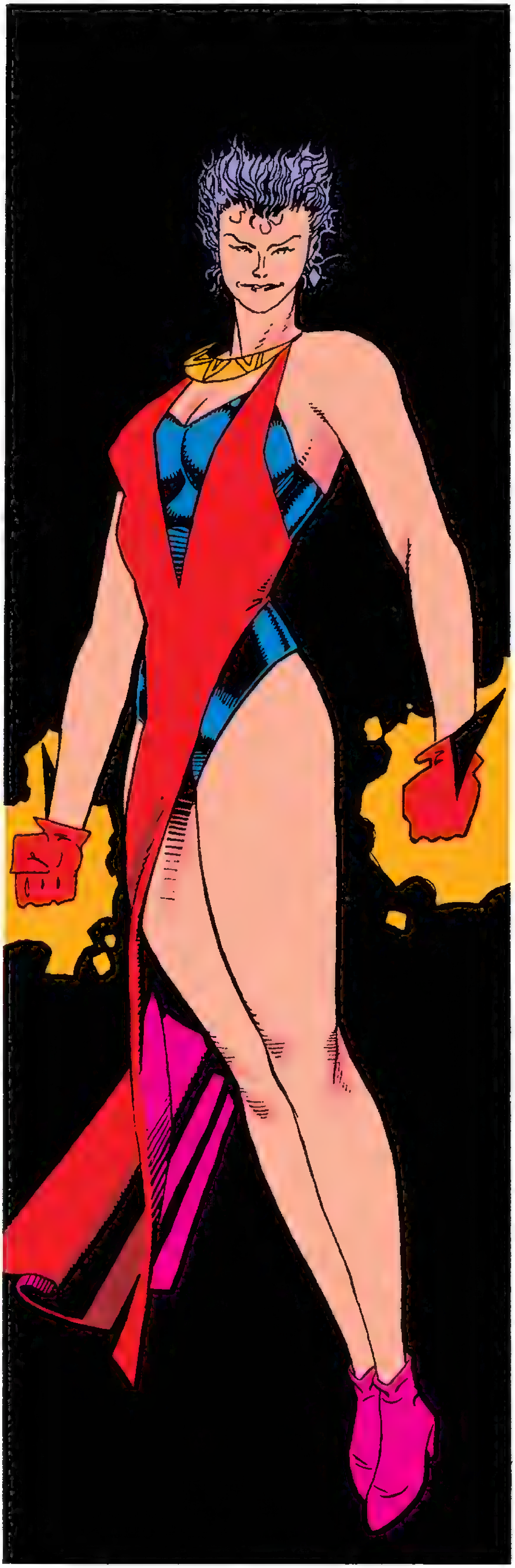
Even when Captain America hasn't officially held the title of Avengers chairman, his status as the group's elder statesman has inevitably tagged him a source of clutch leadership.

Meanwhile, although her experience rivals Cap's, the Scarlet Witch has rarely been accorded such recognition, and she finds herself hampered by self-doubt following her appointment as chairwoman in **AVENGERS WEST COAST #99**. Meet the new boss, hardly the same as the old boss — but destined to grow a whole lot closer in stature as upcoming issues of both **CAPTAIN AMERICA** and a new **SCARLET WITCH** limited series unfold.

Beginning with **CAPTAIN AMERICA #422**, writer Mark Gruenwald, penciler Rik Levins, and inker Danny Bulanadi are having their hero retreat somewhat from his traditional role as Avengers point man. Between run-ins with a new artillery-toting villain dubbed Ballistic, Cap moves out of Avengers Mansion and back to Brooklyn Heights, setting up shop in the building where his Stars and Stripes Hotline is based. In the wake of recent conflicts with his teammates, "Cap feels like too much of a den mother, like his being in the mansion has a stifling effect on the rest of the Avengers," Gruenwald explained.

Cap's eagerly sought breath of fresh air turns lung-choking, however, as change in his routine gives way to violent upheaval in issue #425. "Captain America gets a piece of news that is very possibly going to change his life forever," Gruenwald cryptically hinted. Not only his role as a leader, but his very career as a hero, hangs in the balance.

> "It's a terrific story of demons and fire and brimstone."



The stakes are similarly high in the four-issue **SCARLET WITCH** tale, a series which starts in November and marks the Vision-less Wanda's first truly solo comics run. A supernatural thriller scripted by **FORCE WORKS** writers Andy Lanning and Dan Abnett, penciled by sci-fi artist John Higgins (**MUTATIS**), and inked by Mark McKenna, the book pits its new-look heroine against Lore, a demonic entity who's swallowing the psychic energies of the solar system whole. Lurking in the shadows is an updated Master Pandemonium.

"It's a terrific story of demons and fire and brimstone," Editor Nel Yomtov said. "It's the Scarlet Witch at her orneriest, really — she's pushed out the wall, and she's got to battle this Lore creature in the grittiest way possible."

The underlying function of this trial, Yomtov added, is "to get her character away from being the victim. We want her to be the victor." In achieving this, the Scarlet Witch gains a clearer, more confident perspective on her station as head of the West Coast Avengers and, ultimately, Force Works. "Having gone through this series, she will come out saying, 'There's no question about it — I am the leader of this group. I have earned that distinction,'" he noted.

SOLO FLIGHTS

In addition to **THE SCARLET WITCH** storyline, current **AVENGERS WEST COAST** action is spawning two Yomtov-helmed limited series featuring Spider-Woman and Hawkeye. Both will embark on truth-seeking quests, but only one will return to the Avengers fold.

In the four-part **SPIDER-WOMAN**, due in September, **AVENGERS WEST COAST** writer Roy Thomas takes his recent Deathweb story arc a step further, aided by the moody pencils of artist John Czop. The female web-spinner's second encounter with this nightmarish band of spider-like mutants reveals a startling link between her origin and theirs, one which involves Julia Carpenter's parents, as well. U.S.Agent joins in helping to unravel the mystery.

"We discover that the things that empowered her to be Spider-Woman are a lot more sinister than we've been led to believe," Yomtov said. These hidden factors are also a lot more potent than anyone realized, giving rise to the likelihood that her powers can be *augmented* — and her value to her team increased.

> "...the things that empowered her to be Spider-Woman are a lot more sinister than we've been led to believe."

While Spider-Woman's journey toward self-discovery takes her as far as the jungles of South America, Hawkeye retreats to the Canadian Rockies in his four-issue interlude, debuting in November following the joltingly tragic conclusion of **AVENGERS WEST COAST #100**.

Although Hawkeye heads off to the wilderness seeking some time for quiet introspection, writer Chuck Dixon (**THE PUNISHER**, Epic's **LAWDOG**), hot new penciler Scott Kolins (**LETHAL FOES OF SPIDER-MAN**), and inker Tim Dzon (**AVENGERS WEST COAST**) plan to have the archer "rough it" in a less idyllic sense, as he stumbles across a shadowy genetics operation and is compelled to investigate.

"He really hadn't been planning on any serious action — he just brought along his quiver and a normal array of arrows," Yomtov explained. But as the situation escalates, Hawkeye fashions himself a new costume and dives in, answering gnawing questions about his own place among the ranks of the super heroic along the way. War Machine turns up to lend a welcome assist, but clearly, Yomtov said, this is Hawk's mission, one which will establish him as a loner for the foreseeable future.

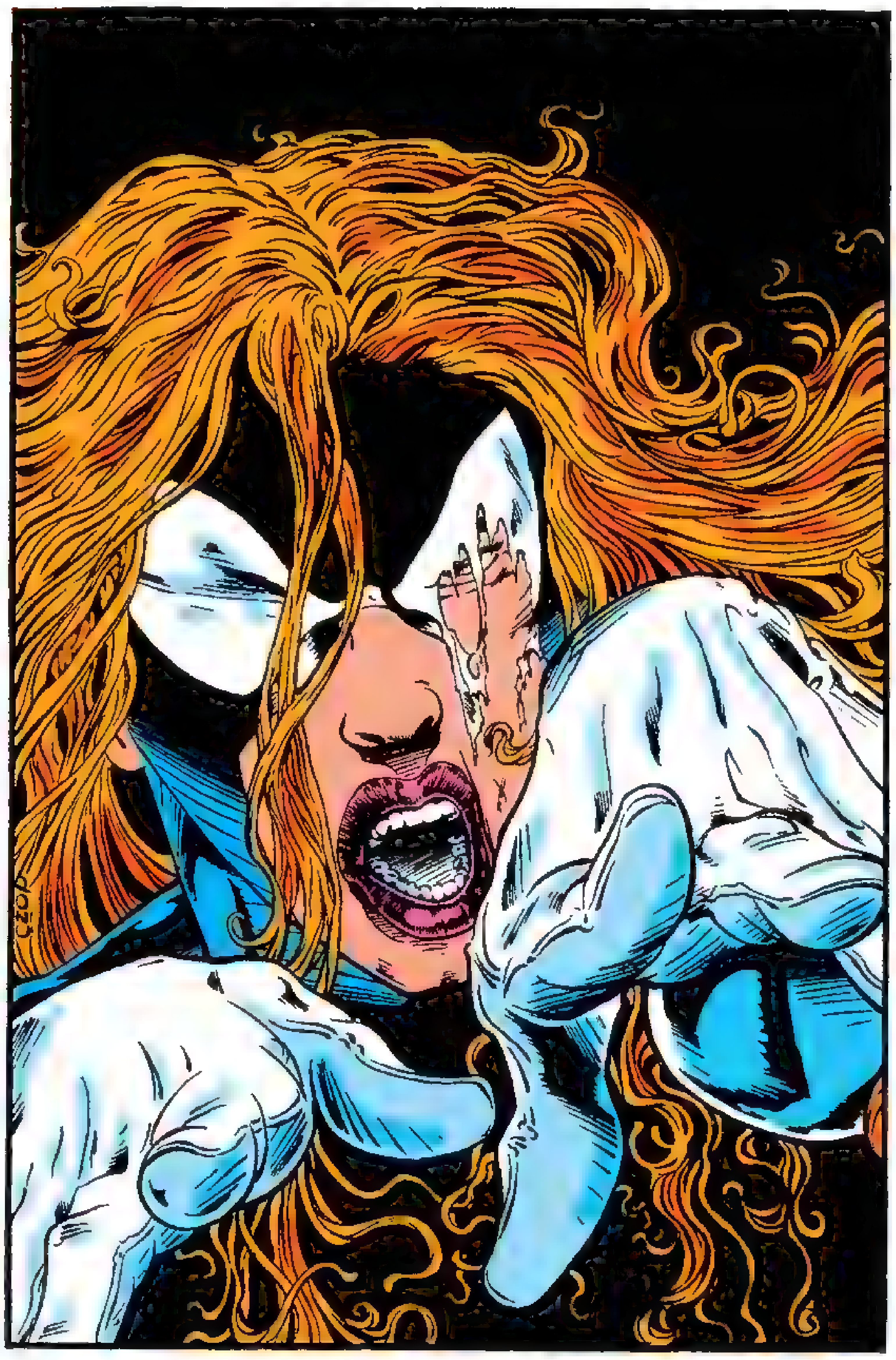
"This is as intense a storyline as Hawkeye has ever seen."

TO AVENGE AGAIN?

Once an Avenger, always an Avenger, presumably, even though Quasar and Wonder Man, like Hawkeye, Thor, and others, will be kept in something of a reserve role as the team's anniversary draws to a conclusion. **QUASAR**, in fact, will figure more immediately into **FANTASTIC FOUR** continuity; following Wendell Vaughn's return to Project Pegasus and a later encounter with Warlock, writer Mark Gruenwald and artist John Heebink (**SHIELD**) are ushering their hero into **STARBLASTERS**, a four-issue limited series involving multiple crossovers with **QUASAR**, **THE FANTASTIC FOUR**, and **THE SECRET DEFENDERS**. Gruenwald described the cosmic-scale epic as focusing on "a group of alien pirate-tyrants who will stop at nothing to get the power of the Starbrand." Let the Marvel Universe (and the New Universe, for that matter) beware.

Following Simon Williams' recent transformation into a being of pure energy, **WONDER MAN** stands to be played out in a vast arena in the next few months as well. Editor Nel Yomtov, who joined the creative team of writer Gerard Jones, penciler Tim Hamilton, and inker Brad Joyce with issue #26, said that the revamped Wonder Man won't be as self-absorbed as he's been in the past, and that the book's prominent Hollywood setting will be eased into the background.

"Wonder Man's dedication will rise to a very grand scale, even to the point where he'll be a loose cannon at times," Yomtov said. This new outlook will leave his team status indeterminate, but a planned confrontation with the Hulk and a future storyline set in Asgard will continue to keep a big focus on him.



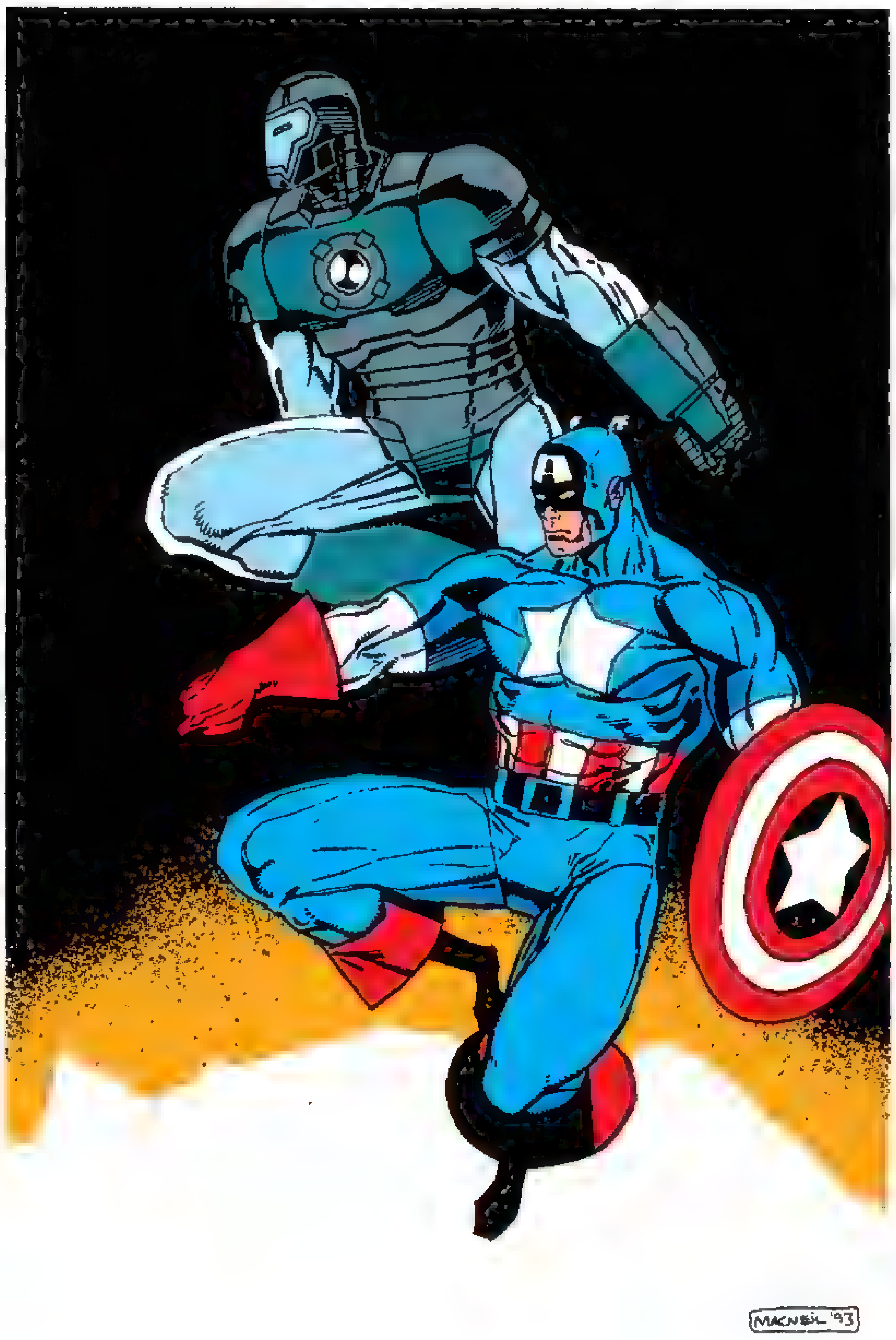
CHARTING THE PAST — AND THE FUTURE

A pair of bookends to the continuing legend of Earth's Mightiest Heroes will be made available to readers later this year in the form of **THE AVENGERS FILES** and **THE AVENGERS LOGS**, both edited by Richard Ashford.

Crafted in a vein similar to *THE X-MEN STRIKEFILE*, **THE AVENGERS FILES** will feature a mix of comic art and computer-enhanced images reviewing past adventures. A Kree record of Avengers history discovered amid the debris of "Operation: Galactic Storm" furnishes the book's unique framework. Current **AVENGERS** writer Bob Harras is teaming up with artist Jeff Moore (**AVENGERS**, *Valor*) on the 16-page Kree narrative, while a host of other talents contribute bonus pin-ups.

THE AVENGERS LOGS looks to be an invaluable, studied reference companion to past and future developments, with encyclopedic entries on the team's sizable membership and a guide to Avengers Mansion. "The idea behind **THE AVENGERS LOGS** is to give readers a sort of crib sheet for studying this group," Ashford said. "Thirty years of history is a lot to get your hands around."

And it may very well be that the most exciting, adrenaline-charged Avengers chapters are yet to be written.



Having entered the world of comics through pieces written for the Boston Globe, *writer/researcher Tom Russo continues to split his time between MARVEL AGE assignments and "real world" journalism for* Premiere *magazine.*

Sidebar:

Iron Man
Writer: Len Kaminsky
Penciler: Kev Hopgood
Inker: Steve Mitchell
Editor: Nel Yomtov
Frequency: monthly
Pages: 32
Price: $1.25

War Machine
Writer: Len Kaminsky
Penciler: Gabriel Gecko
Inker: TBD
Editor: Nel Yomtov
Frequency: monthly
Pages: 32
Price: $1.25

Thor
Writer: Ron Marz
Penciler: Bruce Zick
Inker: Mike DeCarlo
Editor: Mike Rockwitz
Frequency: monthly
Pages: 32
Price: $1.25

Thunderstrike
Writer: Tom DeFalco
Penciler: Ron Frenz
Inker: Al Milgrom
Editor: Ralph Macchio
Frequency: monthly
Pages: 32
Price: $1.25

Captain America
Writer: Mark Gruenwald
Penciler: Rik Levins
Inker: Danny Bulanadi
Editor: Mike Rockwitz
Frequency: monthly
Pages: 32
Price: $1.25

Hawkeye
Writer: Chuck Dixon
Penciler: Scott Kolins
Inker: Tim Dzon
Editor: Nel Yomtov
Frequency: monthly
Pages: 32
Price: $1.75

Quasar
Writer: Mark Gruenwald
Penciler: John Heebink
Inker: Ralph Cabrera
Editor: Mike Rockwitz
Frequency: monthly
Pages: 32
Price: $1.25

Starblasters
Writer: Mark Gruenwald
Penciler: Andy Smith
Inker: TBD
Editor: Nel Yomtov
Frequency: four issues monthly
Pages: 48
Price: $2.50

Wonder Man
Writer: Gerard Jones
Penciler: Tim Hamilton
Inker: Brad Joyce
Editor: Nel Yomtov
Frequency: monthly
Pages: 32
Price: $1.25

Spider-Woman
Writer: Roy Thomas
Penciler: John Czop
Inker: Fred Fredericks
Editor: Nel Yomtov
Frequency: four issues monthly
Pages: 32
Price: $1.75

Scarlet Witch
Writer: Andy Lanning and Dan Abnett
Penciler: John Higgins
Inker: Mark McKenna
Editor: Nel Yomtov
Frequency: four issues monthly
Pages: 32
Price: $1.75

WHERE

ANACHRONAUTS — Warriors from different time periods, now serve Ravonna the Terminatrix in Chronopolis

ANT-MAN II — Active as a crimefighter in Los Angeles

ARKON — Rules otherdimensional world of Polemachus

BARON ZEMO I — Deceased

BARON ZEMO II — Recently captured by Spider-Man and jailed

BEAST — Active in X-Men's Blue Team, Avengers reservist

BEYONDER — Transformed into a large Cosmic Cube, part of which later became the female cosmic humanoid Kosmos, who now travels through the universe as Kubik's companion.

BLACK KNIGHT I — Deceased

BLACK KNIGHT II — Deceased

BLACK KNIGHT III — Active in East Coast Avengers

BLACK PANTHER — Ruler, African kingdom of Wakanda, engaged to marry American singer Monica Lynne, Avengers reservist

BLACK WIDOW — Active in East Coast Avengers

BOGATYRI (Doctor Vladimir Volkh, Mikula Golubev, Svyagator, Morning Star) — A hard-liner Soviet counterpart to the Fantastic Four, the Bogatyri reached accommodation with the Russian government after the collapse of the Soviet Union. One member, the anti-American Morning Star (Zvezda Dennista), quit the team in protest, recently aided the Avengers west Coast against Doctor Demonicus, and has become attracted to the US Agent.

CAPTAIN AMERICA — Active in East Coast Avengers

CAPTAIN ATLAS — Has settled on an unnamed planet with Dr. Minerva to parent a new superhumanoid race of Kree

CAPTAIN MARVEL I — Deceased

CAPTAIN MARVEL II — East Coast Avengers reservist, active in New Orleans

CARTER, PEGGY — Member of East Coast Avengers support crew, communications

CHTHON — Imprisoned beneath Wundagore Mountain, exerts evil influence on Earth through the Book of the Darkhold (developments forthcoming in "Midnight Sons" titles)

COLLECTOR — At large in outer space

COTATI — Sentient, psionic plant race, current activities unknown.

COUNT NEFARIA — Deceased; powers and costume adopted by the criminal Nefarius.

CRYSTAL — Active in East Coast Avengers

DEATHBIRD — Governs the Kree as viceroy on behalf of her sister, Shi'ar majestrix Lilandra

DEATHWEB (Antro, Arachne, Therak) — A team of mercenaries with spider-like powers, captured by the Avengers West Coast imprisoned

DOCTOR DEMONICUS — Seemingly drowned during the sinking of his island kingdom Demonica

DOCTOR MINERVA — Has settled on an unnamed planet with Capt. Atlas to parent a new superhumanoid race of Kree

DOCTOR PYM (*aka* Ant-Man I, Giant-Man I, Goliath I, Yellowjacket I) — Avengers West Coast reservist, continuing scientific research in Los Angeles

ENCHANTRESS — Presumably now living in Asgard, current activities unknown

FALCON — Avengers East Coast reservist, active New York City's Harlem, recently accompanied Captain America on various cases

FIREBIRD (aka Espirita) — Former Avenger and Ranger, current activities and whereabouts unknown

GHAUR — Deviant high priest who masterminded the recreation of the Serpent Crown; vanished during a confrontation with the spirit of Naga, the Avengers, and the Fantastic Four; current whereabouts unknown.

GILGAMESH — Eternal and Avengers reservist

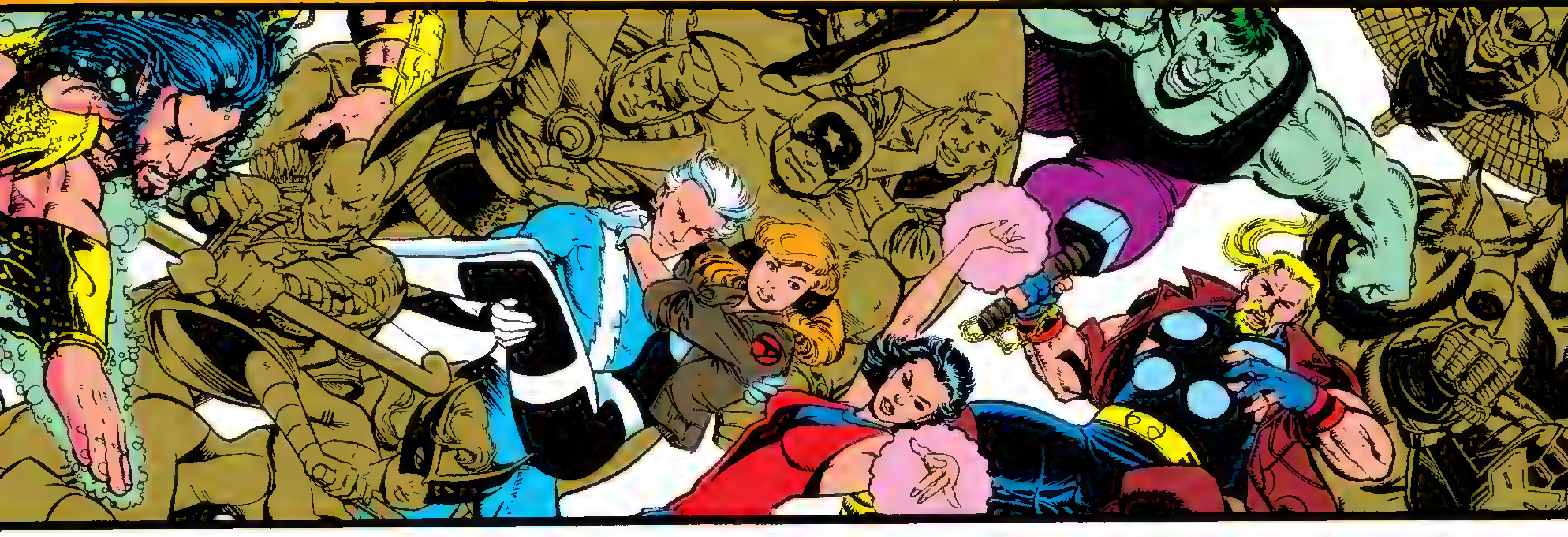
GOLIATH III (POWER MAN I) — Imprisoned in the Vault

GRANDMASTER — Current activities unknown

GRAVITON — Imprisoned in the Vault

ARE

GREAT LAKES AVENGERS (Big Bertha, Dinah Soar, Doorman, Flatman, and Mister Immortal) — Still active as a crimefighting team in the Midwest with the "official" Avengers' approval



THEY

GRIM REAPER — Transformed into a zombie-like being, allied with the demonic entity Blackheart, has recently clashed with brother Wonder Man in Mephisto's realm.

HAWKEYE — Active in Avengers West Coast, reconciled with wife Mockingbird

HELLCAT — Recently went mad and is cared for by her husband Daimon Hellstorm and their friend the Gargoyle.

HERA — Currently undertaking a scheme of vengeance against Hercules.

HERCULES — Active with the East Coast Avengers.

HIGH EVOLUTIONARY — Geneticist with evolutionarily-advanced powers, recently went insane and is cared for by his New Men and the New Immortals somewhere in outer space

HULK — Currently leads the Pantheon during its founder Agamemnon's absence.

HUMAN TORCH I — Having lost his flame powers, the original Human Torch pursues a normal life in the company of his close friend, Ann Raymond. Avengers reservist

IMMORTUS — Unknown to Avengers, currently observes the Terminatrix ongoing activities

INVISIBLE WOMAN — Currently active in the Fantastic Four

IRON MAN — Slowly recovering from a brush with death, the bedridden Tony Stark now operates an Iron Man battlesuit by cybernetic remote control. Returned to the Avengers during the Infinity Crusade.

JAMESON, JOHN — Recently began a new career as a costumed crimefighter.

JARVIS, EDWIN — Butler and head of staff for the East Coast Avengers headquarters

JOCASTA — Destroyed by an anti-matter explosion at the end of the "Evolutionary War"

JONES, RICK — Living in Reno, Nevada

KANG — Fatally wounded in protecting the Terminatrix, who placed him in suspended animation at his Chronopolis base

KORVAC (*aka* **MICHAEL**) — Projected his consciousness into various descendants until it returned to his own infant form in the Guardians of the Galaxy's alternate future

KREE — Billions of the alien Kree were killed by the radiation of a "nega-bomb" at the climax of the Kree-Shi'ar War; the rest underwent mutation and are now ruled by the Shi'ar.

KUBIK — A Cosmic Cube who achieved sentience and humanoid form, now travels the universe with Kosmos.

LAVA MEN — A small number were transformed into golden shape-changing humanoids, the remaining members of the race currently ruled by the mad Subterranean Grotesk.

LIVING LASER — Energy being whose form was recently disrupted by War Machine

LIVING LIGHTNING — A West Coast reservist pursuing his college education.

LLYRA — Vanished during a confrontation with the spirit of Naga over possession of the new Serpent Crown

LOKI — After taking possession of Odin's body, Loki's Asgardian spirit was captured by Mephisto and imprisoned within a mystical soul shroud.

LUNA — Lives at the Avengers' New York City headquarters with mother Crystal.

MACHINE MAN — Serves as a reserve member of the Avengers West Coast.

MAELSTROM — After usurping the identity and powers of the abstract being Anomaly, Maelstrom attempted to destroy the universe with an enormous black hole, but was apparently destroyed himself in combat with Quasar.

MAGNETO — Recently reappeared after his apparent death during an encounter with the X-Men

MANDARIN — After his last clash with Iron Man, the Mandarin lost his rings and hands and fell into a deep coma, and is cared for by the peasant Li Sung somewhere in China.

MANTIS — After projecting her consciousness into a body of plant matter and giving birth to the "Celestial Messiah," Mantis became the companion of the Silver Surfer in space. Last seen asking Moondragon for help in freeing her son from the Cotati.

NOW?

MARRINA (*aka* **LEVIATHAN**) — Seemingly killed by Namor, the Sub-Mariner

MASTER PANDEMONIUM — Swallowed up by a mystical gap in his own body during his last encounter with the Avengers

MASTERS OF EVIL (membership varies; current roster: Doctor Octopus, Absorbing Man, Gargantua, Jackhammer, Oddball, Powder Keg, Puff Adder, Shocker, Titania) — The most recent version of this criminal team invaded the Avengers' East Coast headquarters during the "Infinity War" but were defeated by the Guardians of the Galaxy.

MISTER FANTASTIC — Currently active in the Fantastic Four.

MOCKINGBIRD — Active with the Avengers West Coast, married to Hawkeye

MOONDRAGON — A member of Adam Warlock's Infinity Watch.

MOON KNIGHT — Active as a crimefighter in New York City

MOONSTONE II — Imprisoned in the Vault.

MS. MARVEL I (**BINARY**) — Starjammer, lost her memory and original superhuman powers to X-Men member Rogue, gained new superhuman abilities and joined the Starjammers as Binary.

NEBULA — Converted into a cyborg, Nebula resumed her career as a space pirate.

NGH THE UNSPEAKABLE — Merged with the female humanoid Ahh to become an unnamed being of great power, left for outer space to aid alien civilizations.

NIGHT SHIFT (Hangman II, Brothers Grimm, Dansen Macabre, Digger, Gypsy Moth, Misfit, Needle, Tatterdemalion, Ticktock) — No longer led by the Shroud, who manipulated them into fighting crime, the Night Shift still operates as a team of criminals in the Los Angeles area

NUKLO — No longer emitting toxic levels of radiation, Nuklo now leads a quiet life as a service station attendant in Woodstock, New York.

O'BRIEN, MICHAEL — Member of the Avengers East Coast support crew

PACIFIC OVERLORDS (Dr. Demonicus, Cybertooth, Irezumi, Jawbreaker, Kain, Kuroko) — Disbanded with the apparent demise of Doctor Demonicus

PALADIN — Active worldwide as a mercenary

PEOPLE'S PROTECTORATE (Crimson Dynamo V, Fantasma, Perun, Red Guardian IV, Vostok) — Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the super team now serves the Russian government.

PHANTOM RIDER I — The spirit of this crimefighter of the Old West takes possession of the modern day day Phantom Rider IV

PHANTOM RIDER IV — The present day successor to his legendary ancestor, the new Phantom Rider operates as a member of the Southwestern crimefighting team, the Rangers.

QUICKSILVER — Currently a member of X-Factor seeking reconciliation with his estranged wife, Crystal.

RAGE — Currently a member of the New Warriors

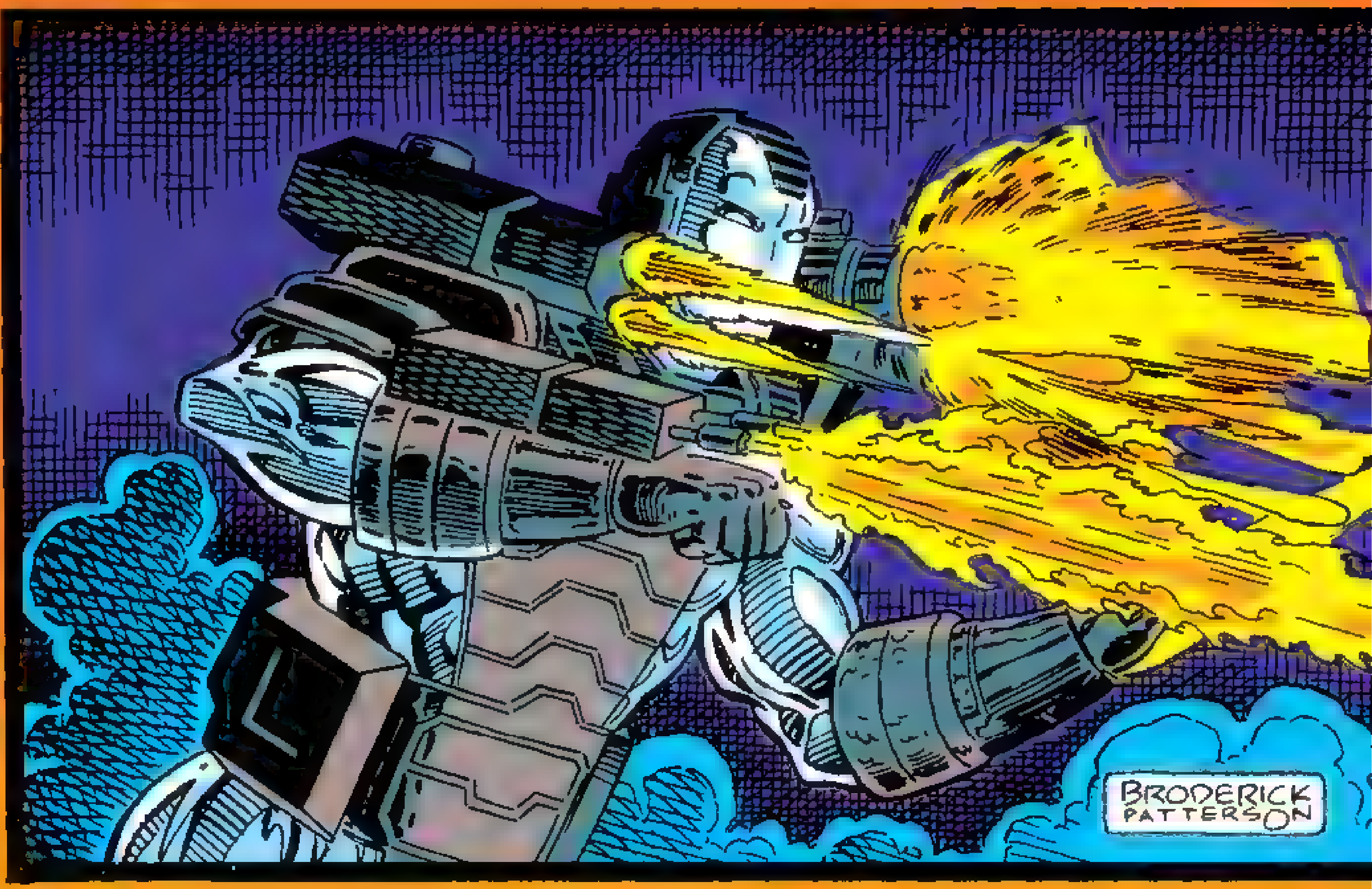
RAMA-TUT — Has not been seen in the 20th Century since he helped the Avengers combat his evil other self, Kang the Conqueror.

RED GUARDIAN II — Husband to the Black Widow, died saving her life in China

RED WOLF — Active in the Western United States as a crimefighter and Native American champion, recently encountered Nomad

RONAN THE ACCUSER — Battled the Avengers during the Kree-Shi'ar War, current whereabouts and activities unknown

SANDMAN — Currently a member of Silver Sable's Wild Pack.



SCARLET CENTURION — Became Kang the Conqueror; a divergent version of the Scarlet Centurion now rules an interplanetary empire in the future of the Squadron Supreme's time line.

SCARLET WITCH — On leave from the Avengers West Coast.

SCORPIO I — Jake Fury, brother to Nick Fury, whose human consciousness inhabits an android form, was deactivated along with the rest of his android Zodiac II in the dimension of the Brotherhood of the Ankh.

SERSI — Active with the East Coast Avengers

SET — This ancient demon's body was destroyed by Thor, who hurled Set's heads into various other dimensions.

SHE-HULK — East Coast Avengers reservist, active in New York City as a crimefighter and lawyer

SHI'AR — Having triumphed in the Kree-Shi'ar War, Princess Lilandra and the Shi'ar now also rule the remains of the Kree Empire

SHROUD — Although he poses as a criminal, the Shroud secretly fights crime in Los Angeles. Recently severed his ties with the Night Shift.

SKRULLS — Alien race recently regained their shape-changing powers thanks to Empress S'byll, who has reorganized the Skrull Empire under her leadership. The Skrulls secretly manipulated the Kree and Shi'ar into war against each other.

SONS OF THE SERPENT — The most recent version of this racist organization unsuccessfully clashed with the Avengers and New Warriors in New York City.

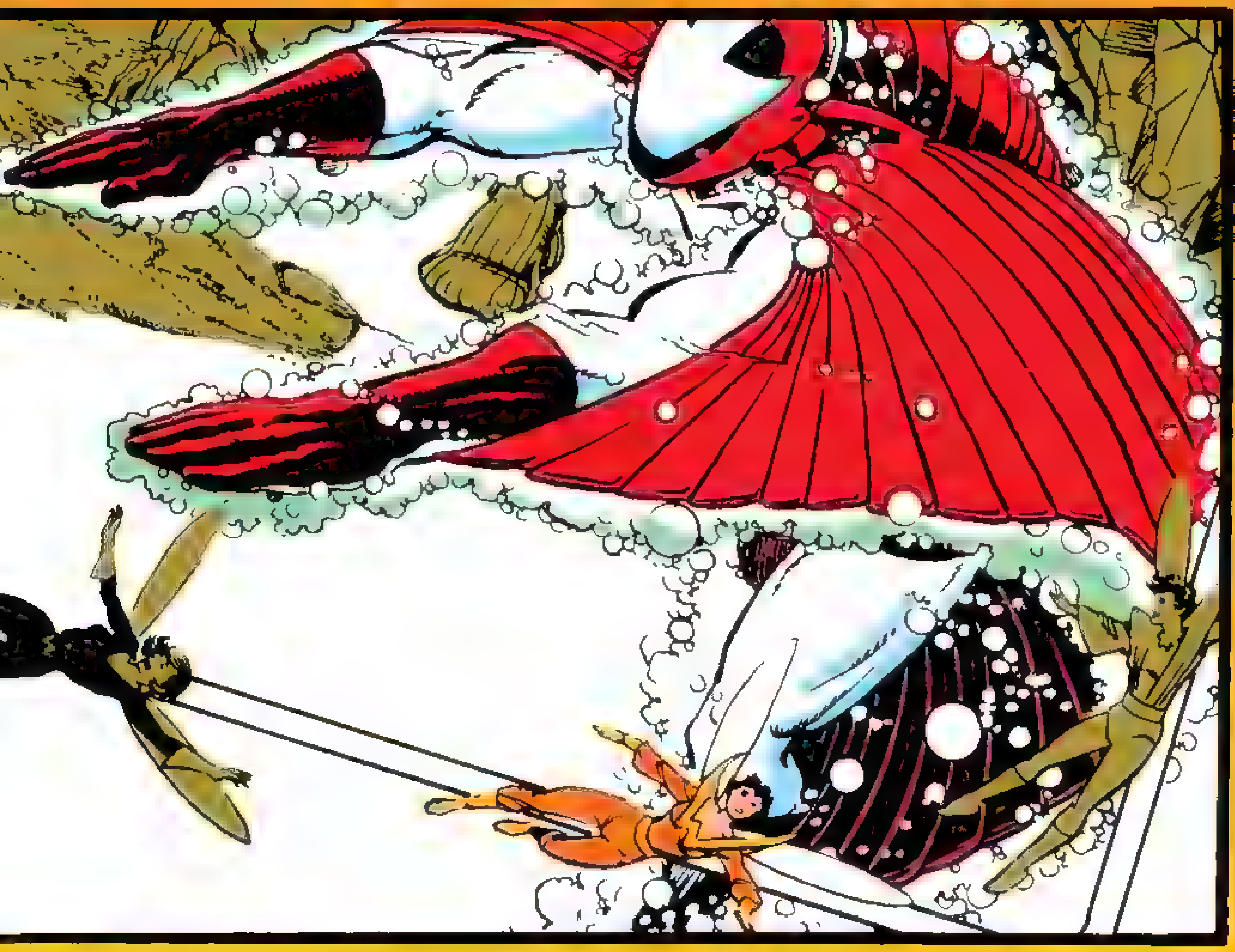
SPACE PHANTOM — Still residing in Immortus's limbo

SPIDER-MAN — Active as a costumed crimefighter in New York; although an East Coast reservist, Spider-Man has not participated in recent Avengers activities.

SPIDER-WOMAN II — An active member of the Avengers West Coast.

SQUADRON SINISTER (Hyperion II, Nighthawk II, Doctor Spectrum II, Speed Demon) — The sole remaining active member of this criminal team is the Speed Demon, who recently served in the Sinister Syndicate. Hyperion II and Nighthawk II were killed and Doctor Spectrum II's Power Prism was rendered useless.

SQUADRON SUPREME — The surviving members are based at Project: Pegasus on the Avengers' Earth and are seeking a means of returning to their own alternate Earth.



STANKOWICZ, FABIAN — Member of the Avengers East Coast technical support crew

STARFORCE (Deathbird, Korath the Pursuer, Shatterax, Ultimus, Captain Atlas, Doctor Minerva) — Current members of the Kree Starforce serve the Shi'ar under the direction of Deathbird.

STARFOX — Avengers reservist most recently active during the Kree-Shi'ar War, currently residing on Titan

STARJAMMERS (Corsair, Ch'od, Raza, Hepzibah, Binary) — Currently serving Shi'ar Princess-Majestrix Lilandra

STINGRAY — An honorary reserve member of the Avengers, otherwise continuing his oceanographic research

SUB-MARINER — Recently returned to Atlantis

SUPER-ADAPTOID — Most recently fought Spider-Man as a member of the new Enforcers.

SUPREME INTELLIGENCE — Although the Supreme Intelligence's physical form was destroyed by many of the Avengers at the end of the Kree-Shi'ar War, his consciousness survived.

SWORDSMAN — Deceased; the original Swordsman's body was returned to its grave by the Cotati.

TASKMASTER — Most recently defeated by Daredevil.

TERMINATRIX (*aka* **RAVONNA**) — Rules Chronopolis and Kang's vast empire, in his stead.

TERMINUS — Imploded in outer space following his last battle with the Avengers. A Terminus battlesuit was recently discovered and employed by AIM in the Savage Land but was destroyed by Antarctic Vibranium.

TETRARCHS OF ENTROPY — Dispatched by Quasar, Thor, and Sersi to the "dimension of exile"

THANE ECTOR — Leader of the alien Brethren, now deceased.

THANOS — After losing the Infinity Gauntlet, Thanos retired to the quiet life of a farmer on an unnamed planet, but recently aided the Avengers and other Earth heroes against the Magus during the Infinity War.

THING — Currently active in the Fantastic Four.

THOR I — Freed from imprisonment within Thor II's subconscious mind, Thor I has devoted himself to his duties as a prince of Asgard. Recently has traveled through outer space in the company of a mysterious Valkyrie and seems to be falling victim to warrior madness.

THUNDERSTRIKE (*aka* **THOR II**) — After acquiring the enchanted mace, Thunderstrike, Eric Masterson rejoined the East Coast Avengers.

TIGRA — On leave of absence from the Avengers West Coast, living with aborigines in Australia

TWO-GUN KID — Crimefighter from the 1870s, participated in Avengers missions when he traveled through time to the present. Currently back in the 19th century.

UATU THE WATCHER — Still observes Earth from the Blue Area of the Moon.

U-FOES — Most recently worked for the Leader but were defeated by the Hulk.

ULTRON — Launched into outer space on a missile with his "mate" War Toy

USAGENT — Active in Avengers West Coast

VISION — Currently active with the East Coast Avengers.

WAR MACHINE (*aka* **IRON MAN II**) — James Rhosed, resigned from Stark Enterprises and joined the Avengers West Coast.

WAR TOY — Launched into outer space on a missile with her "mate" Ultron during their battle with the Avengers

WASP — On leave from the Avengers, remains a reservist with the Avengers West Coast. Continues to pursue her careers as a fashion designer and screenwriter.

WHIRLWIND — Last seen among costumed criminals at AIM convention

WHIZZER I — Deceased.

WONDER MAN — Resigned from the Avengers West Coast but continues his careers as a costumed crimefighter and film star in Los Angeles.

YELLOW CLAW — In seclusion following his recent clash with Nick Fury and SHIELD

YELLOWJACKET II — Joined the Guardians of the Galaxy and traveled with them into their 30th century alternate future time line

ZEUS — Monarch of Olympus, father of Hercules

ZODIAC I — All members except Scorpio I now deceased, in most cases killed by Scorpio's android Zodiac II.

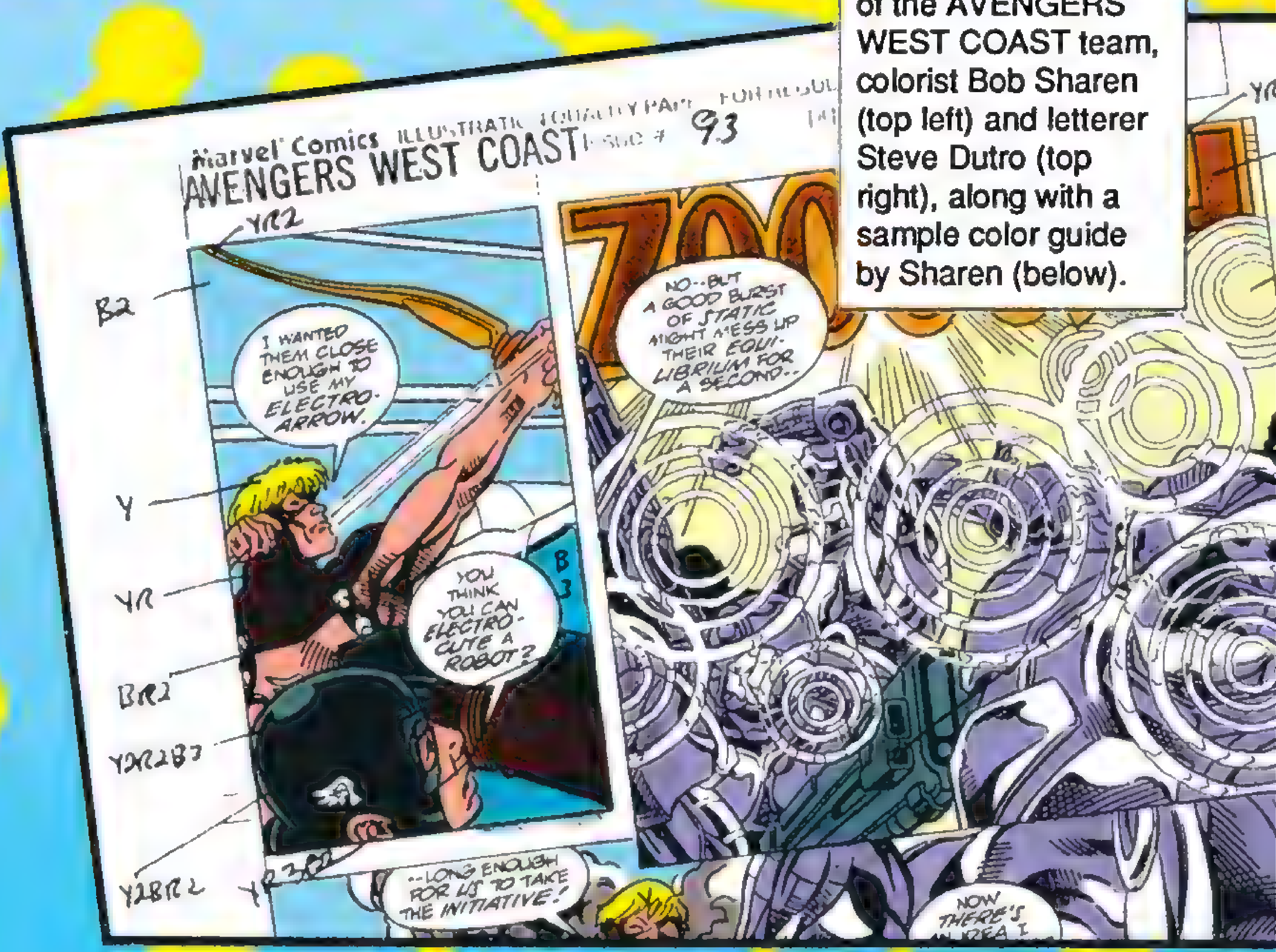
ZODIAC II — All android members were deactivated in the dimension of the Brotherhood of the Ankh.

If there's an archivist of the comic book universe, his name is Peter Sanderson. He has been a regular contributor to MARVEL AGE, THE OFFICIAL HANDBOOK OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE (all editions), MARVEL SAGA, WOLVERINE SAGA and Who's Who in the DC Universe. His credits include "The Kang Chronicles" (in the 1992 Avengers Annuals) and "The Saga of the Serpent Crown" (in the 1989 Marvel Annuals.)

Colorists and Letterers

PRO FILES

— Terry Hernon


Marvel Comics AVENGERS WEST COAST Issue # 93
YR2
B2
Y
YR
BR2
YR2B3
Y2BR2
YR2BR2
B3
I WANTED THEM CLOSE ENOUGH TO USE MY ELECTRO-ARROW.
YOU THINK YOU CAN ELECTRO-CUTE A ROBOT?
NO--BUT A GOOD BURST OF STATIC MIGHT MESS UP THEIR EQUILIBRIUM FOR A SECOND--
--LONG ENOUGH FOR US TO TAKE THE INITIATIVE!
NOW THERE'S AN IDEA I

The unsung heroes of the AVENGERS WEST COAST team, colorist Bob Sharen (top left) and letterer Steve Dutro (top right), along with a sample color guide by Sharen (below).

Comic readers around the world are familiar with the names of the industry's foremost writers and artists. Even the most casual fans know who Stan Lee, John Romita Sr., Peter David, and Andy Kubert are. Fewer, though, are familiar with the colorists and letterers, the other craftsmen who make vital contributions to the production of comic books.

The writer determines the concept for a book, the penciler creates artwork based on the writer's guidelines, and the inker defines the artwork, but the colorist and the letterer greatly influence the final product, as well. **THE AVENGERS** is currently colored by veteran Tom Palmer and lettered by Bill Oakley, while the **AVENGERS WEST COAST** roster includes colorist Bob Sharen and letterer Steve Dutro.

With all the glamor associated with being a writer or a penciler, one wonders if there are any rewards in being a letterer or a colorist. According to Bob Sharen, Tom Palmer, and Steve Dutro, there certainly are.

After Bob Sharen graduated from Newark State College, he worked as an art teacher, which he said, "was a horrible job, and I hated it." Later, he took a job working with retarded children, which he found rewarding in every way except monetarily. In 1970, the idea of living a hippie lifestyle lured Sharen to Carmel, California, which resulted in a job working with the area's most famous resident and former mayor. "I got into acting," he said. "I was in a Clint Eastwood movie, *The Iger Sanction*. We played kids in a classroom, and we were chosen, I think, because we knew not to pick our noses and look at the camera." Sharen also appeared in *Master Gun Fighter*, a movie that starred Tom Loughlin of **Billy Jack** fame, which he said "was a lot of fun, but it was a lame movie."

In 1976, Sharen returned to the East Coast and met up with Dave Hunt, a former classmate, who was looking for an inker. "I learned to ink," he said, but "I hated inking. It didn't suit my temperament at all. Then I tried coloring, and I said, 'Wow, this is really fun!'" Sharen's first coloring job was for Godzilla #13, which was published during Jim Shooter's tenure as editor-in-chief at Marvel. It was Shooter's practice to personally approve new colorists, and the fledgling Sharen brought his work into the editor-in-chief's office. "Obviously, you've been coloring a long time," Shooter remarked after seeing the pages. When Sharen told him, "No, not really," Shooter replied, "Well, how would you like a job?" The colorist subsequently worked on **SPIDER-MAN, CAPTAIN AMERICA, INCREDIBLE HULK, DR. STRANGE**, and others before embarking on his current stint on the **AVENGERS WEST COAST**.

The value of a good colorist is integral to the success of a comic book, and Sharen has great respect for his craft. "Good coloring helps good art and storytelling, but bad coloring can really hurt a story. The basic thrust of being a colorist is that you're working on someone else's work. You have to stick with the mood of the story, do it up right, and don't get in the way. When you get great art, it's a great inspiration."

But, while coloring is enjoying and rewarding, it is not without its challenges. The colorist gets his work close to press time, after the artist and the inker. "We're the guys at the end of the line," Sharen said, "so we get the time pressure. I have a rule. If I get a job that's so tight, I'd rather pass on it. . . I take pride in my work. Lately, there's a proliferation of colorists who haven't had formal training and the art suffers.

--I CAN'T ALSO HAVE A SENSE OF HUMOR?
--TO EARN POINTS FROM YOUR DEATH!

"Colorists have been struggling for years to get equal treatment," Sharen commented. "While writers and artists earn royalties on their work, we only get a page rate, but we have to plug in there and do our best. We're contributing to the story. If it weren't for the colorists the books would all be black and white, and you'd let the kids color them in."

THE AVENGERS inker Tom Palmer shares Sharen's pride in being a colorist, having been an early crusader for the recognition colorists enjoy today. "Neal Adams and I worked on some original **X-MEN** and **AVENGERS**. They didn't give coloring credits then, but Neal would do an issue, and I would do an issue, and we both felt very strongly about the coloring, how important it was to the book." But while Palmer, an art school graduate with an illustration background, shares Sharen's regard for their craft, he disagrees that a colorist should be required to have formal training. "He has no art background," he said of colleague Greg Wright, "and he is a terrific colorist. We were talking about color, and I asked him a question about using complementary color when he wants to subdue something, and he didn't know what I was talking about. So he is ignorant of color theory, but he is a terrific colorist. What I'm trying to say is that you don't need an art school color background or color theory in order to color a comic book. Once you learn the mechanics of it, and you've got a guide in front of you, and you've got to stay within that guide, I think that's the rules of the game. You've got to stay within the parameters, but what color you put down is your own personal taste."

Palmer enjoys his run on **THE AVENGERS**, adding, "I'm really on with some great people." He credits writer Bob Harras for the series renewed success. "Bob Harras has got something in the back of his mind where he wants to lead the book, and every issue seems to be going in that direction. Everyone that I've spoken to has come up to me and said, 'gee, I can't wait for the next issue. I can't wait to read it.'" Palmer admits to being a big Avengers fan himself. "Here I've been working on the books for weeks, and I'm even saying, 'What are they doing? I'm hanging, I'm waiting! There's a cliffhanger at the end, so by that time I'm so excited, then I've gotten some ideas of what I want to do, and maybe I'll grab a chunk from the book and color that first, because I think that's the most exciting part of the book, and I'll put a lot of color in that area."

Palmer finds **AVENGERS** artist Steve Epting's pencils motivational, and commented, "I think Bob is inspired by the artwork, also." When asked who produces the pencils easiest to color, Palmer said, "The easiest guy, the guy you can't screw up, is Joe Kubert. Anybody can color Joe and make it look good. And if you color, you'll understand."

AVENGERS WEST COAST letterer Steve Dutro also has good words for Joe Kubert, having graduated from the Joe Kubert School, which is where, he said, "just about every Marvel staff letterer went." When asked why he chose a career in lettering, as opposed to the one of the other, more glorified disciplines, Dutro answered, "Right now, I'm making ten times as much money as my friends who are penciling."

Dutro began his career at Marvel as a staff letterer, picking up freelance work to do in the evenings. "I got about four hours sleep [each night] for a year and a half before I got enough freelance work not to have to go in [to the office]."

The letterer then left New York to return to his hometown of Red Bluff, California, where he continues to work steadily, with the help of a fax machine and Federal Express. "I get up at seven and start working from there," he said. "I don't have to get dressed if I don't want to."

Aside from the freedom to make his own hours and never have to leave his house, Dutro explained another boon to his career, working on **AVENGERS WEST COAST**. "I enjoy working with it because the penciler has a good sense of draftsmanship. When you're working with something that seems uninspired, you just want to be done with it." He added that, for obvious reasons, "copy heavy scripts are not popular with letterers."

Dutro mentioned another favorite job, a departure from the action and fisticuffs of most of his projects. "I like working on **BARBIE**. It's a refreshing change, believe me," he laughed. "They have some people working on that book who are doing a really nice job. I give copies of **BARBIE** to my friends. They love it!"

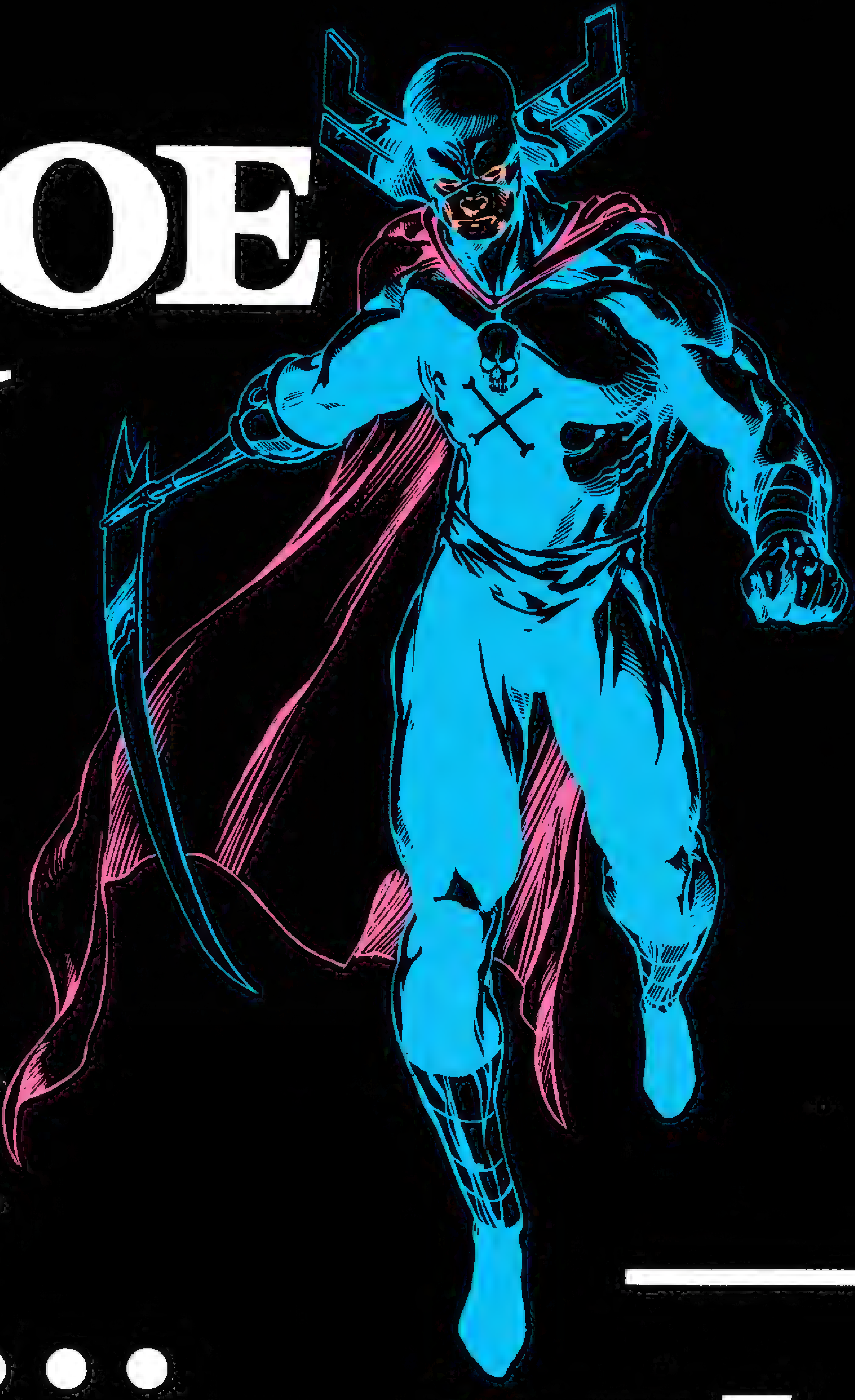
In recent years, several publishers have started to use computerized lettering in the production of comic books, and Dutro offered his opinion of this emerging trend. "[It] scares the hell out of me. Lettering should be done by hand the way God intended it to be. You can do so many creative things by hand with lettering that a computer can't do." His tone lightening somewhat, Dutro said, "Some companies are starting to use them, and I'm going to have to write some stern letters."

For those who would dismiss his contribution to the industry, Dutro said that lettering is "a major part of the look of the comic. Half of what you're looking at is what the letterer did, so it's a big part of the artwork." He added, "I thought people didn't pay attention to lettering, but they do. People in comic stores will recognize you and ask you for your autograph. It's really weird."

It's not that weird. Seasoned comic aficionados realize that it takes more than great writers and artists to produce the "good art, good story" that keeps them coming back for more. It requires the finishing touches of a good colorist and letterer, which are integral in transforming a good story into a great comic book.

--TO HELP KILL AN AVENGER!
AND YOU'RE NOT?
MAGIC! I REALLY DO HATE

A FOE WORTHY...



Your heart races as you turn to the last page. . . This is it! The villain who has been behind The Avengers's latest woes is about to be revealed! Of course. It's none other than their ultimate arch-foe — Kang!

No wait, that's not right . . .It's their arch-nemesis — Ultron!

Hold on. . .The plot has been hatched by their all-time greatest antagonists — The Masters of Evil!

“WHY WOULD ANYONE GO LOOKING FOR THAT KIND OF ABUSE?”

A difficult task, this one, trying to decide just who is The Avengers's ultimate arch-foe. There really are so many contenders for that title. It's much easier to identify The Fantastic Four's greatest nemesis — Doctor Doom. And the X-Men? Everyone knows it's Magneto. But the Avengers? They've had so many deadly enemies, but to crown one as their arch-foe? That's nearly impossible. The obvious question then is, why? Why is it so hard to put the proverbial finger on who is the arch-foe of the Earth's Mightiest Heroes?

The easy — and most flattering — answer is to say that The Avengers don't have one arch-foe, they have several. However, that tack really just side-steps the issue. To be certain, whenever they face the likes of Kang or Ultron or Grim Reaper the battle is a monumental one. But to call any of these evil-doers The Avengers's “arch-foe,” well that may just cause one heck of a battle among the villains themselves as they try eliminate their competition.

The hard-to-swallow answer is closer to the truth: The Avengers's don't have an arch-foe at all. Does this mean that their enemies are not the cream of evil's crop? Does it mean that the writers who have crafted so many great Avengers's tales over the years have failed in their craft?

No, no, and no. “Sure, The Avengers don't have a single villain as intimately tied to them as, say, Doctor Doom is to the FF,” stated Marvel Executive Editor and occasional **AVENGERS** scribe Mark Gruenwald. “Certainly they've had a number of contenders for that title from time to time, but no one villain that every reader instantly recognizes as their arch-foe. Have the writers and editors failed in their task? No. But writers do have different artistic tendencies and they often desire to develop different things other than ultimate villains.”

Current **AVENGERS** Editor Ralph Macchio also realizes that The Avengers are without one ultimate nemesis. “One of the main reasons for this,” Ralph observed, “is that the team membership is fluid; it changes very often over time. Whenever a new membership lineup is introduced, all the way back to the beginning of the title, the team fights a series of villains, with very little repeat of foes for the same team makeup. Then, before you know it, the lineup changes in some significant way and the team/nemesis relationship changes, too.”

Ralph took his analysis even further, going so far as to point out that sometimes the constant use of an arch-villain can dilute the quality of a title. “Not having an arch-foe is not necessarily a weakness or disadvantage. Having to constantly come up with a reason for conflict — or, more precisely, a new twist to the conflict, battle, and resolution — can become tiring for the creators. It also runs the risk of coming across as forced.”

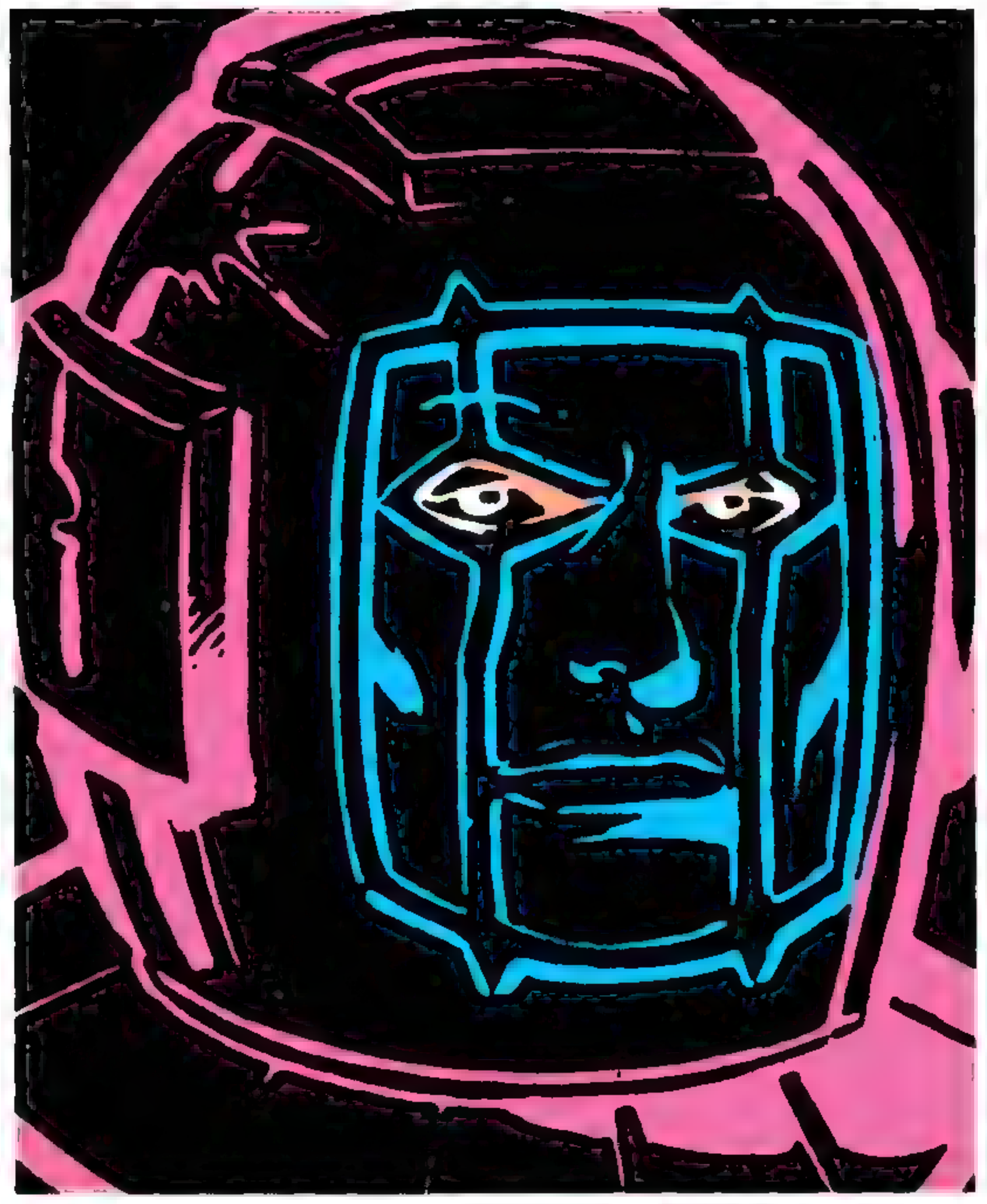
Longtime **AVENGERS** writer Roy Thomas agreed with Ralph. “Perhaps the most fitting reason the Avengers are without an arch-foe is that it is such an eclectic group. The membership changes and thus does the group dynamics. It's hard to be an enemy of ‘the group’ when different heroes are in the lineup. Motives get cloudy and the conflict becomes repetitive.”

But don't The Fantastic Four and The X-Men have the same inherent problems? Both teams have undergone both writer and membership changes. Why then do they have arch-foes while The Avengers do not? Well, for one, each subsequent creative team that has handled those groups has seen fit to stay with at least the same core members, and a similar driving philosophy as followed by the writers and editors before them. Lineups and approaches may have changed, but not on par with The Avengers.

Fine. So The Avengers's membership changes drastically and creators come and go, but still no arch-foe? This is still a little hard to swallow. Perhaps if we examine what makes a super-villain into an arch-foe. Then we might better see why this collection of great heroes, regardless of team dynamics or writer desire, is without a clear-cut winner in the arch-foe sweepstakes. And what better way to do this than by looking at Marvel's two most prominent arch-foes, Doctor Doom and Magneto.

“. . .an arch foe must have the power with which to back up his villainy.”

“Doom and Magneto both have something in their backstories, personal makeup, and goals that make them an integral part of their counterpart's history,” Gruenwald explained. “Doom, with his personal ties to Reed Richards makes you instantly say that he is the *one* arch-foe of the FF. The same is the case for Magneto, who is opposed to how Professor Xavier deals with the mutant problem. No matter who else these two villains may fight, for whatever reason, they really want to see the demise of either the FF or the X-Men. Plus, let's face it, though they have failed in the past, no one doubts that either villain has the power to get the job done.”



Gruenwald pointed out three important factors that go into making a villain a particular hero's arch-foe.

First, there must be a credible reason why that villain hates that particular hero or group so vehemently. Does the group stand philosophically opposed to what the villain hopes to accomplish, beyond the standard reason of good thwarting evil at every turn? Magneto sees the X-Men as a panacea to the mutant situation; he feels that mutant-kind should rule the human race, while Xavier's dream is a world where mutants and normal humans live together in peace. Doom, on the other hand, blames the meddlesome Fantastic Four for all of his foiled political ambitions and personal problems, especially his physical disfigurement.

Second, the villain must have some sort of personal tie to the team or hero that raises the heat of their conflict to a personal level. Magneto and the X-Men are both mutants, hated by many for being different. Doom and Reed Richards are intellectual rivals, and Doom is more than a bit jealous of the family that the FF has formed even as he has no one in his own life.

Finally, an arch-foe must have the power with which to back up his villainy. Surely, no one will deny that Magneto and Doom are physically capable of wiping out their enemies, even if they have not been successful in doing so.

With the above definition in mind, it seems hard to swallow that one of the many Avenger villains can't be proclaimed their one true arch-foe. However, closer scrutiny of the main contenders for that crown will indeed show that to be the case.

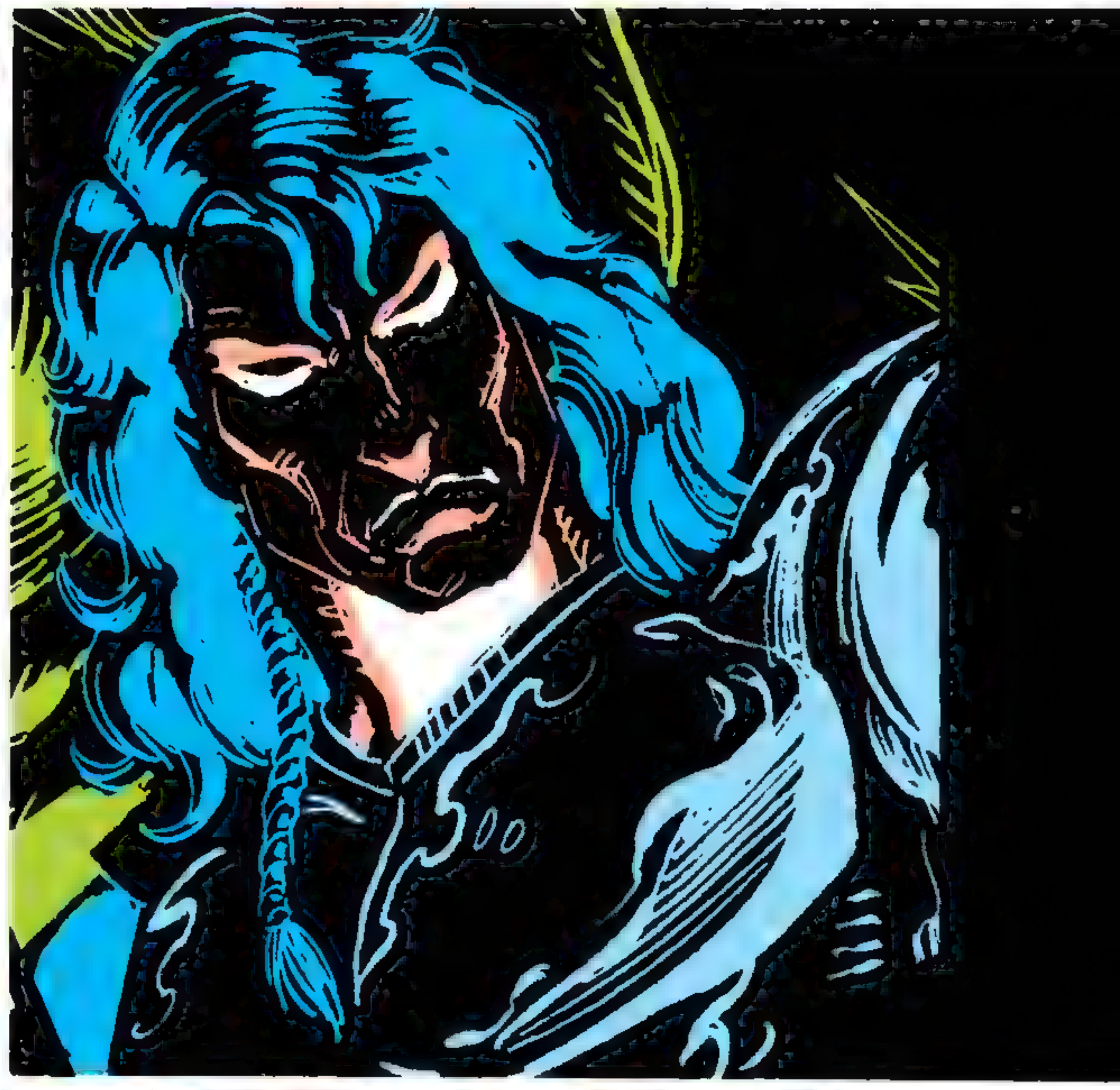
Kang the Conqueror/Immortus: “Perhaps the closest thing to an ultimate foe the teams has is Kang,” Ralph Macchio stated . “At least from the stand-point of how often he returns to battle them and how deeply the conflict runs.”

The time hopping Kang has often travelled from the 41st Century to the present in his attempt to conquer time itself, only to have his plans thwarted by The Avengers. Now, surely, anyone who can manipulate time has the power enough to be considered a team's arch-foe? Well, that's part of the problem — Kang's goal is to conquer, and The Avengers, along with The Fantastic Four, are merely opposed to his plans. He has no real *personal* tie to The Avengers per se.

“The fact that Kang claims to be related to Reed Richards, coupled with the number of times he's been in conflict with the FF, sort of keeps him from being The Avengers's arch-foe,” Roy Thomas reasoned . “His history — or is that his future?Qkeeps him from the title as the ultimate foe.”

The Masters of Evil: Perhaps a group whose membership often changes needs a super-villain group with a fluid lineup to qualify their arch-foe. If that is the case, then the Masters of Evil might fit the bill. Regardless of their membership — whether the roll call included the Wrecking Crew, Absorbing Man, and/or The Grey Gargoyle — The Masters of Evil had the power to take on The Avengers. However, their claim to primacy ends there, especially given that their changing lineup also precludes them from having personal ties to The Avengers. Plus, pointed out current **AVENGERS** writer Bob Harras, their motives are not that strong. “The Masters of Evil was this group of villains who would get together and attack the Avengers for no apparent reason. Why would anyone go looking for that kind of abuse? They just didn't have a purpose.”

Grim Reaper: The Grim Reaper, the undead, self-styled harbinger of life in decay, comes very close to being the Avengers's arch-foe. He has an intimate tie to both Simon



Willaims (his brother) and the Vision, and his death at the Avengers's hands certainly constitutes solid motivation to seek their destruction (especially when you couple this with the fact that he needs to literally absorb the life-force of living beings to survive). However, as Mark Gruenwald pointed out, "Sure, the Grim Reaper has sufficient motive and concrete ties to the team, but he just doesn't have the power to take them all on."

Ultron: Ultron, the all-adamantium sentient robot, appears to be the closest thing The Avengers have to an arch-nemesis, at least by the accepted definition of the term. He is certainly powerful enough to threaten the group, he has many personal ties to the team (Hank Pym is his creator, and Ultron did create the Vision), and he desires more than to just battle The Avengers for the sake of conflict. "Ultron has a lot of potential to be the teams's arch-foe," pointed out Thomas, the villain's creator. "In fact, recently we've seen his motives expand from mere vengeance to wanting to eradicate all organic life on this planet. Ultron goes a long way to showing that a longtime villain can be developed into a formidable opponent, if not arch-villain. It is possible to choose the right villain and transform him into an arch-foe; many writers don't create villain "X" to be the ultimate challenge for a hero. In the case of Ultron, he was just a robot. Now, he's becoming more."

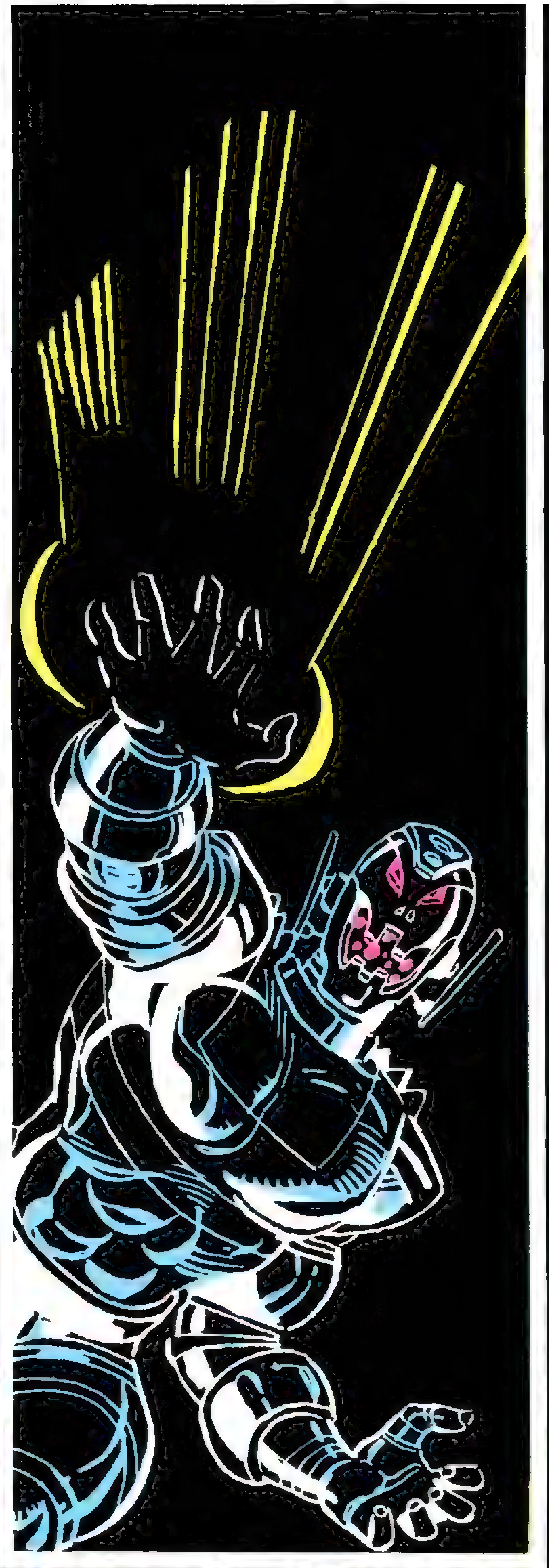
With all of the bases covered, why, then, are readers reluctant to declare Ultron the Avengers's arch-foe? Well, for all of the creative things current writers have done with him, he's "still just a robot," as stated by Thomas and Gruenwald. "Ultron is definitely powerful enough to take on all of the Avengers," Gruenwald added. "But even with his personal connection to the team, he's a mechanical construct and just can't seem to get past the two-dimensionality of this fact."

So, now that it has been established that The Avengers are without an arch-foe, writer Bob Harras has undertaken the task of changing this fact forever. By creating the mysterious Proctor, with his intimate tie to Sersi (and, through as series of plot twists, The Black Knight), and his group of powerful Gatherers, Harras has given birth to what many around the halls of Marvel consider the ultimate nemesis that The Avengers need.

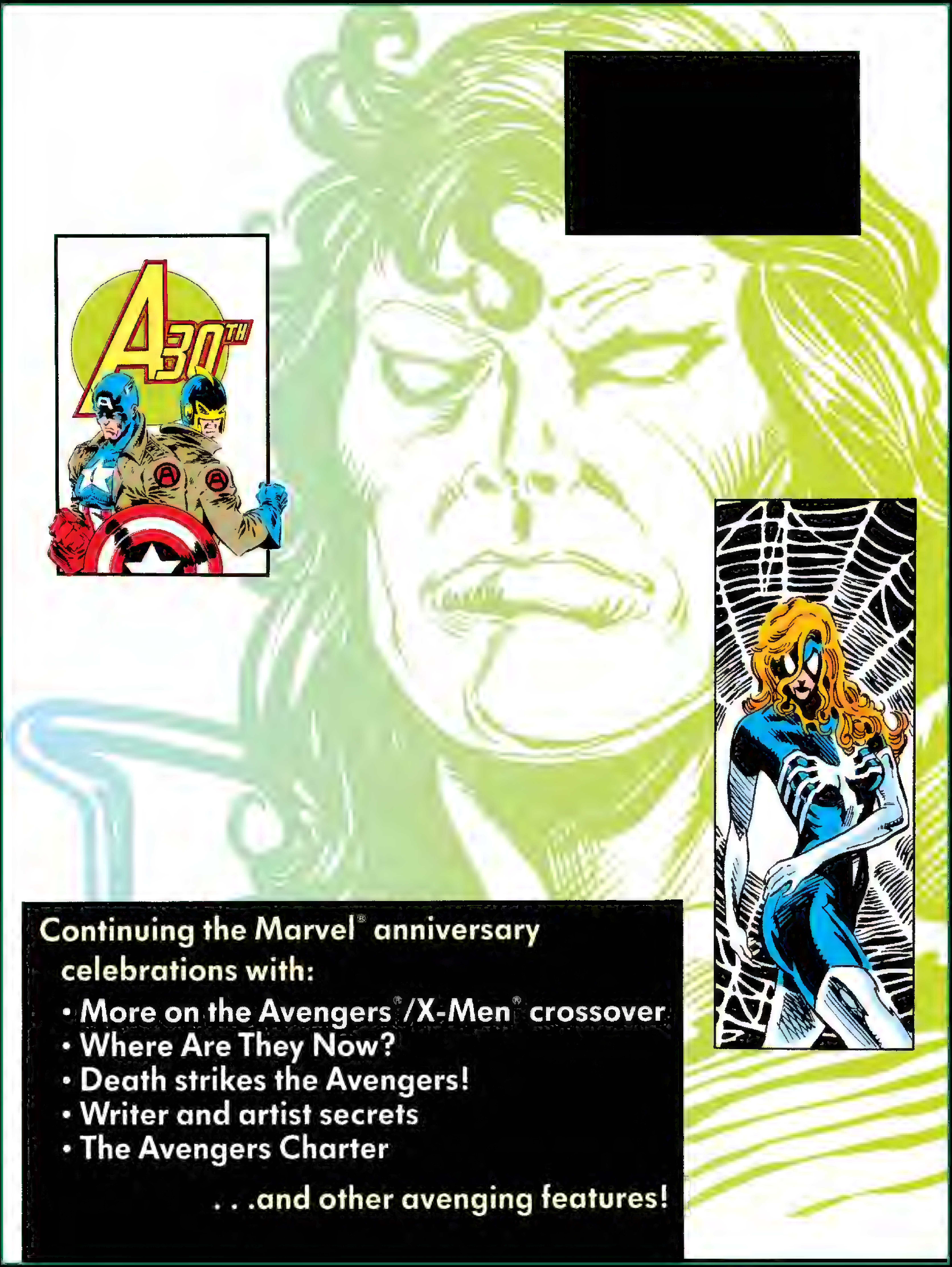
Many readers will recall the genesis of this band of "alternate" Avengers. By exploiting the powers of an injured Watcher, the Proctor gathered a group of beings from various alternate realities. The members of the group all have two things in common: each one is a slightly distorted version of an Avenger and each one has a deeply personal reason for seeking the Avengers' destruction. Thus, driven by a collective thirst for vengeance (as well as the Proctor's constant telepathic manipulation), the Gatherers were born.

"With the Gatherers, I've created a team of villains that has a reason to attack the Avengers," Harras said. "They aren't a mirror image of the Avengers, but their agenda is solely concentrated on the team."

Power base and personal ties — now all that's missing is credible motivation, especially if Sersi leaves the team. Well, as has been established in recent issues of the book, Proctor and his Gatherers appear to be enemies of the Avengers in every dimension of the multiverse, and though the full extent of their plans remain to be seen, you can bet that these villains' reason for being is much more than mere conflict and plunder. As admiringly pointed out by Ralph Macchio, "Bob Harras has put his finger on what could be the Avengers's Magneto."



Jerry Novick, a veteran of the promotional and editorial sides of the comics indusatry, is a regular contributor to MARVEL AGE via "The Hot Sheet." His other Marvel credits include MARVEL PREVIEW '93, X-MEN ANNIVERSARY MAGAZINE and the X-Men trading cards.



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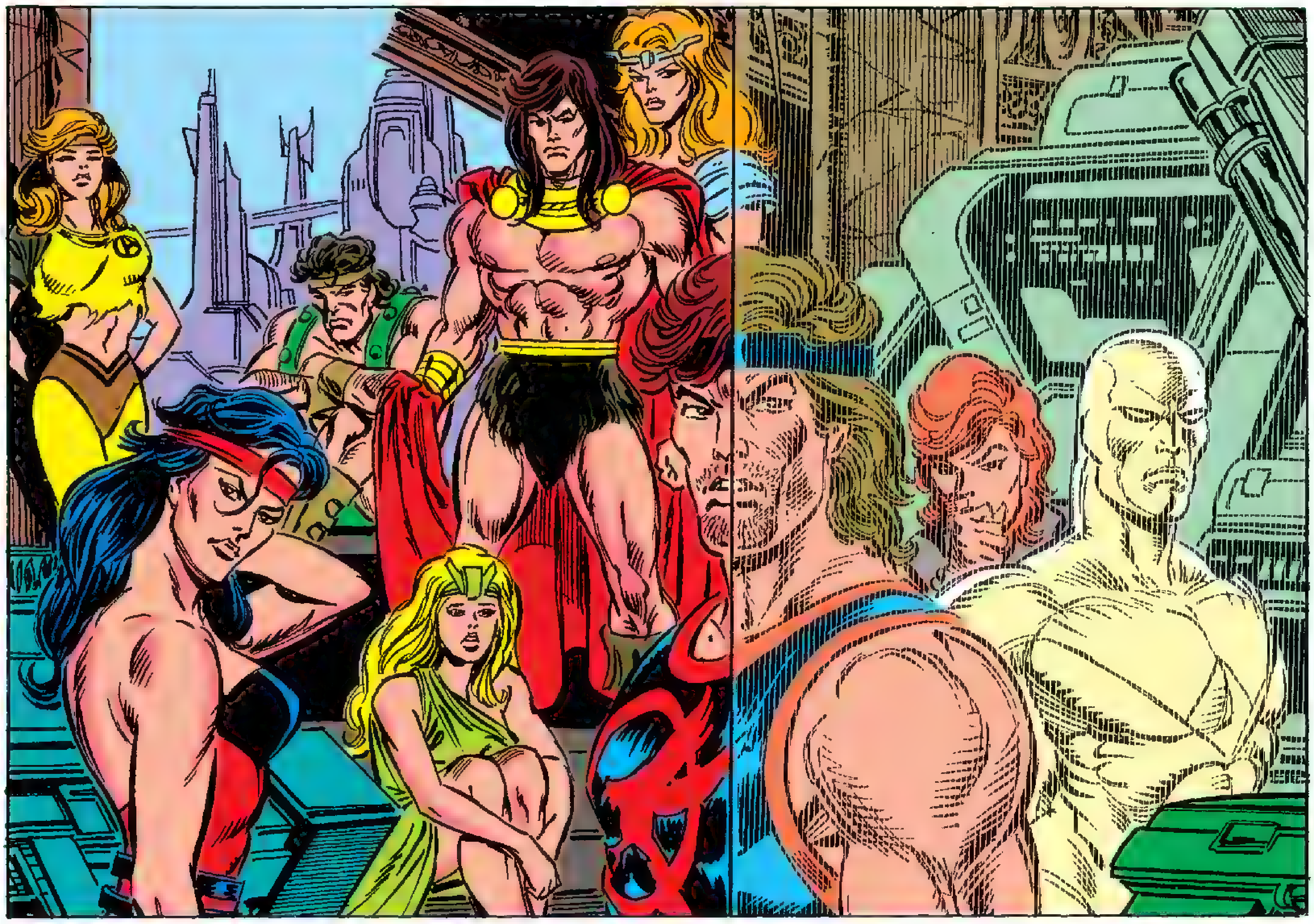
Continuing the Marvel® anniversary celebrations with:

- More on the Avengers®/X-Men® crossover
- Where Are They Now?
- Death strikes the Avengers!
- Writer and artist secrets
- The Avengers Charter

. . .and other avenging features!



TAKING ON THE A-TEAM

Bob Harras
on writing the Avengers

Bob Harras is a multi-talented individual. As group editor of the X-MEN books, he steers all of the characters in Marvel's mutant universe. He received great acclaim for his writing on the NICK FURY VS. S.H.I.E.L.D. limited series, and now he has turned his attentions to another group of Marvel's premiere super heroes, THE AVENGERS.

For the past year, Bob has teamed with penciler Steve Epting and inker Tom Palmer to chronicle the adventures of Earth's mightiest heroes. As the writer for THE AVENGERS, Bob has taken the years of history and tradition behind the team and given them his own slant.

"The Avengers are a group of heroes who are seeking friendship within a group of peers. They are established heroes who have earned their reputation. A hero has to earn the right to be an Avenger, but what makes them special is the code of ethics behind the team. The team is steeped in tradition," Bob said.

But the traditions behind the Avengers have caused some friction among the team during Bob's reign. The outcome of "Operation: Galactic Storm" created a rift between Captain America, the man many consider the quintessential Avenger, and the rest of the team.

"The killing of the Supreme Intelligence went against everything Cap stands for and everything he feels that The Avengers should stand for. Because of his feelings, I had him leave the team. To be perfectly honest, I don't mind him being gone from the book. He's a great character, but when he's on the team, he dominates it. The book almost becomes 'Captain America and his Avengers.' Cap is such a strong character that the rest of the team follows his agenda almost blindly. That tends to drive a lot of the tension from the stories," Bob said.

> "A hero has to earn the right to be an Avenger. . ."

Bob's removal of Captain America was also in keeping with his plans to focus on some of the other characters from the Avengers' past. The Avengers team now includes Crystal, the Black Knight, Sersi, the Black Widow, Hercules, and the Vision. Bob put together this group of characters for a specific reason — to bring back the family feeling to the Avengers. Bob feels that this family

Up Front

ITEM! On November 5th, a quiet little town in rural New York state called Chappaqua became the setting for the creation of nightmarish, flesh-eating monsters bent on the destruction of the human race. It was there at the Edith Macy Conference Center that Group Editor Bobbie Chase brought together the editors, writers and artists of the Midnight Sons line of books for an all day meeting to discuss what will be happening for 1993 in the dark corner of the Marvel Universe.

After 10 hours of exhaustive brainstorming, the creative teams of GHOST RIDER, SPIRITS OF VENGEANCE, MORBIUS, NIGHTSTALKERS and DARKHOLD came up with a number of exciting ideas. The most significant being that, in 1993, there will be two Midnight Sons crossovers.

The first will be short and sweet; a five part story crossing over the June on-sale issues of each title. The story begins when one of the Midnight Sons characters receives a page from the Darkhold that promises to destroy all supernatural beings. What it achieves instead is the creation of a rampaging demon who even the combined Midnight Sons are powerless to stop.

The second crossover will be much more monumental. In the original "Rise of the Midnight Sons" storyline it was made clear that the "walls" which separate our world from other dimensions were weakening. This weakening hasn't stopped. In fact, after the events of the June crossover, the walls start crumbling. The result is an invasion of demons into our world. Slated for October, this major, multi-part crossover event is tentatively titled, "All Hell Breaks Loose!"

In addition to the crossovers fans can look forward to these changes in the coming year.

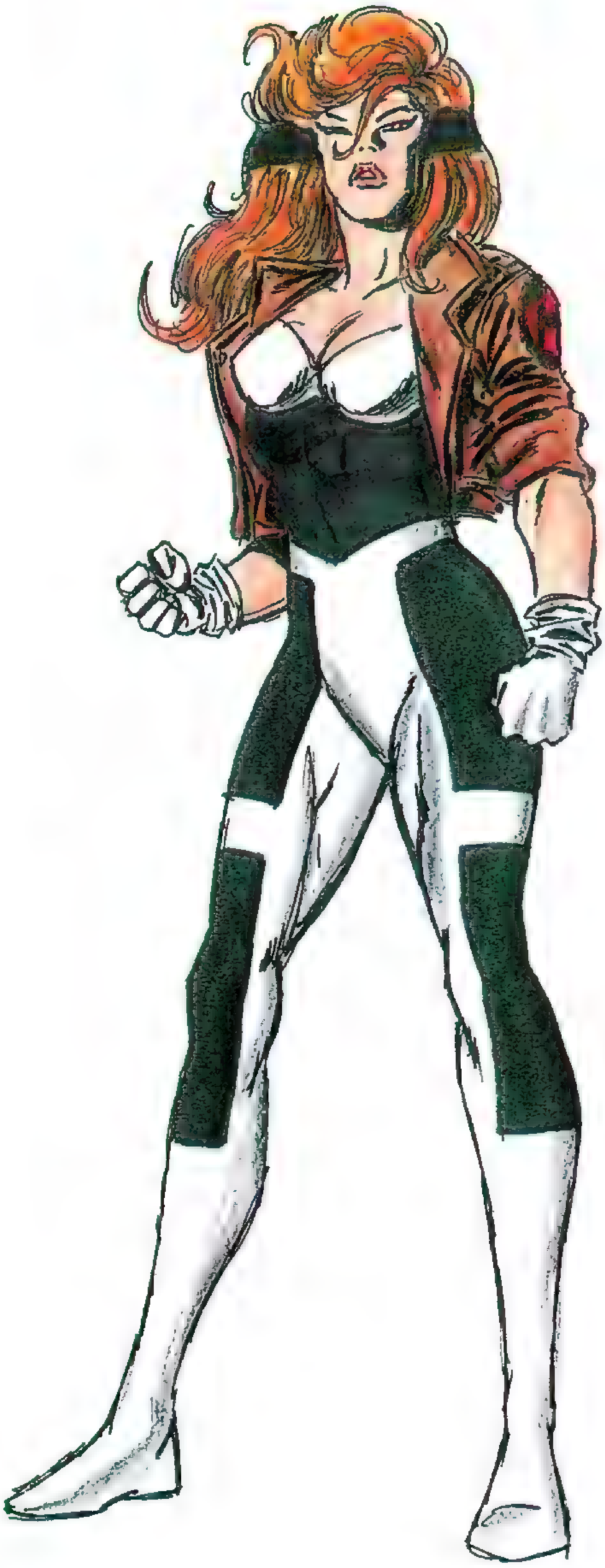
NIGHTSTALKERS — a new look for Blade and the return of a *major* villain.

SPIRITS OF VENGEANCE — the return of Mephisto, the search for the soul crystal and more on Blaze's connection to the supernatural.

GHOST RIDER — the answer to the question, "Is Ghost Rider Zarathos?"

DARKHOLD — the revelation of Vicki's true "father" and the rebirth of the greatest evil of all time.

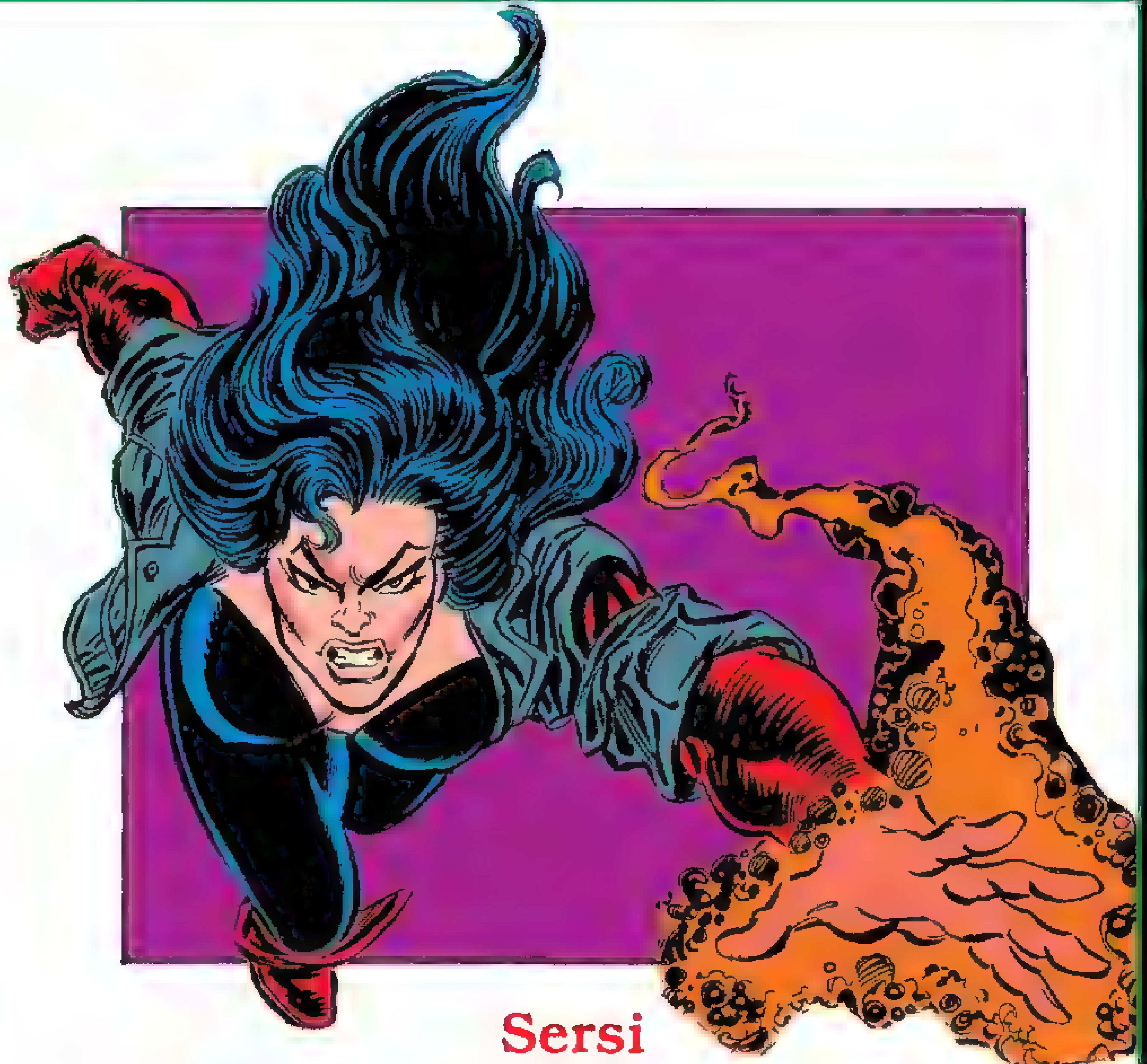
MORBIUS — Morbius, contaminated with the blood of one of the Lilin (Fang), develops new powers with terrible consequences.



Crystal

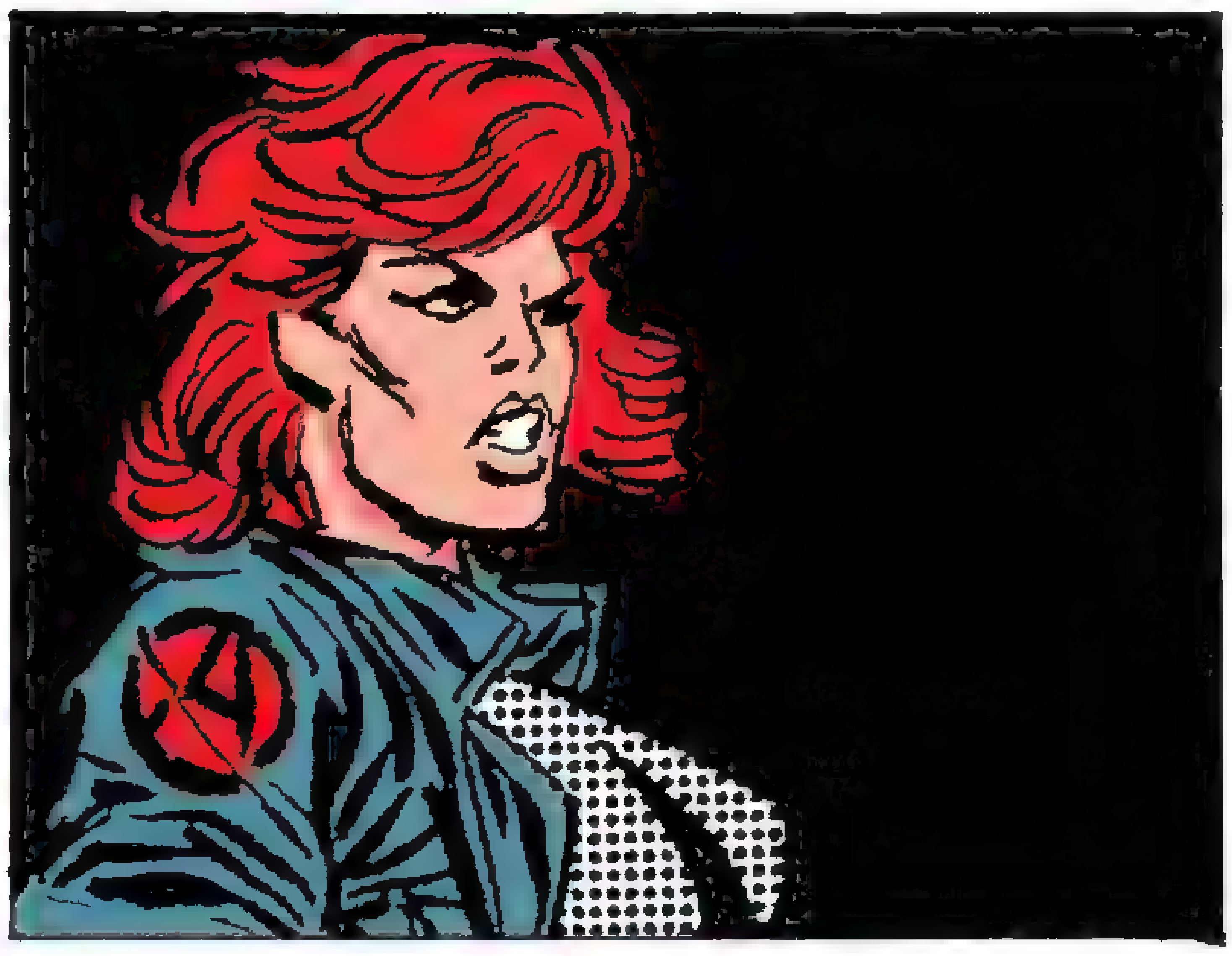
"Crystal is a ripple character. She's the one character that I chose specifically for the team. She has so many connections in the rest of the Marvel Universe that lots of stories seem to flow out of her. She's married to Pietro from X-Factor. She's the mother of Magneto's granddaughter. She's an Inhuman. She's a former member of the Fantastic Four. So much has happened to her that can have effects across the entire world of Marvel.

"I also put her into the book so that she can be the 'New Avenger.' I can use her for reactions to the team and the way they work together. Since I was new to the team, I thought I should have a character who was new, too. And it doesn't hurt to have a female character to develop romantic storylines around."



Sersi

"Sersi was on the team when I took over the the book and, like I said, I didn't want to throw out everybody and start from scratch. So I kept her around. At first I didn't really know what to do with her. In fact, I don't think anybody ever really did. She was just suddenly a member of the team. I didn't feel like she had a reason for joining or a reason to be on the team once she was there. I've now found the handle on her. She's less of a party-girl. I've given her a down side, and hopefully I've made her more three dimensional. I feel that she's now a far more interesting character."



Black Widow

"The Widow is another character who was there when I took over. She's a leader-type character, and since I was having Cap leave the team, Natasha was the natural to take over as chairman. What I find interesting about her is that she realizes that her powers aren't really built for Avengers-style villains. She's willing to lead the team and not participate in the battles. She handles the day-to-day routine, and yet she is definitely in charge. The others on the team respect her."

Bob has also created The Gatherers, a new group of villains to oppose the Avengers. They have appeared through most of Bob's run on the series and will continue to plague the Avengers throughout their 30th anniversary year. The Gatherers are a group of super-powered characters from other dimensions who favorably match up to Harras's Avengers. They are led by the mysterious Proctor.

"If you look back at the Avengers rogues gallery, it's just not that strong. There's Ultron and there's Kang. Then there were teams like the Masters of Evil. The Masters of

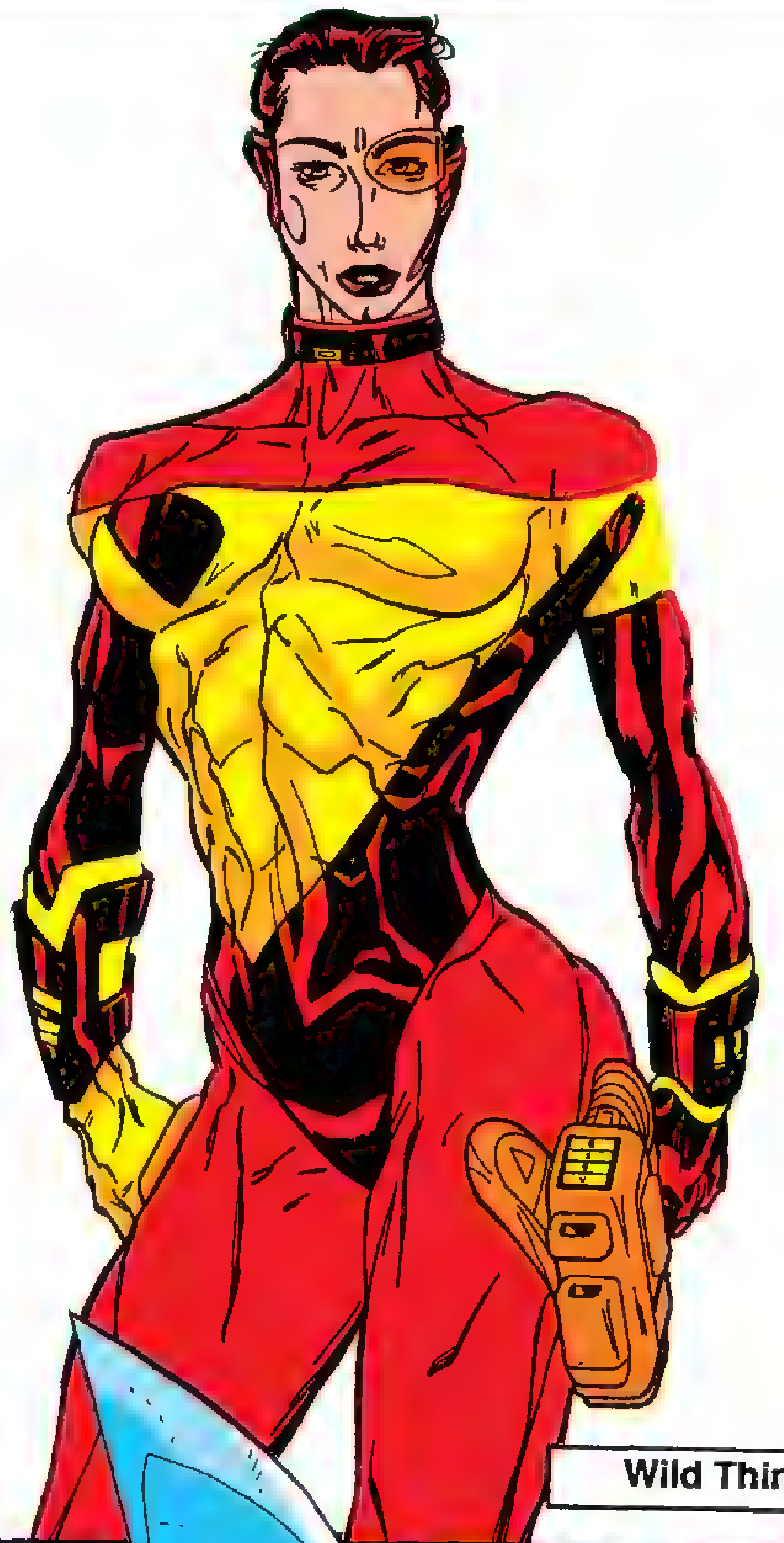
ITEM! Marvel UK seems determined to top last year's achievements by introducing *three* new ongoing monthly series in February alone.

In SUPER SOLDIERS, the title characters originate from a bizarre experiment conducted on dead and dismembered bodies. During the 1982 Falklands War, a secret branch of the military collected body parts of the dead and dying to create an army of scientifically enhanced soldiers. The project was scrapped when one of the soldiers went berserk and used his superhuman strength to kill all the others but one. The two survivors were placed in cryogenic suspension for further study and today, 10 years later, the two have been accidentally released. Written by Michael Bennent and Lee Stevens and penciled by Andrew Currie (IRON MAN) this new book focuses on these two surviving Frankenstein warriors as one seeks his true identity and revenge against the other survivor, a murderous berserker, and his creators.

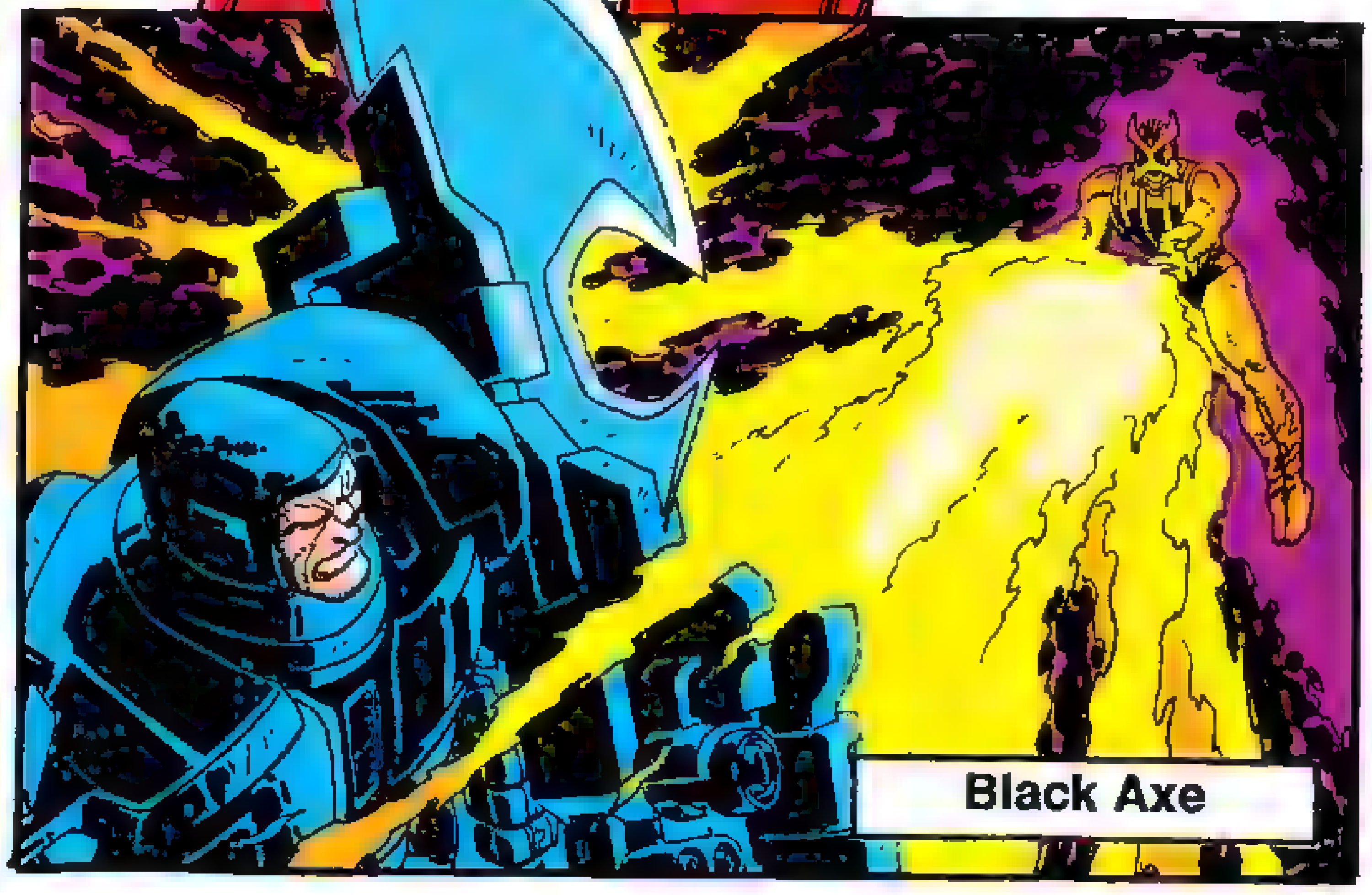
WILD THING takes place in a violent and corrupt world of the future in which virtual reality threatens to destroy society. Virtual reality (VR) is a term for computer programs which generate images so perfect that they seem real. In this futuristic world, VR has become a drug, with electronic fantasy addicts buying illegal VR programs from high-tech dope pushers, even though the long term effects on addicts are insanity and *death*. Arcade, a special government task force, hunts down the death dealing VR pushers, and Arcade's top agent is detective Nikki Doyle (codename: Wild Thing), an ex-addict who has the power to enter the minds of VR users and interact with their digitized dreams. Written by Simon Jowett (WARHEADS) and penciled by Duke (DARK ANGEL) Mighten, WILD THING takes readers to the most alien world of all — the darkest recesses of the human mind.

BLACK AXE is the ultimate gun for hire. Not just an ordinary mercenary, Black Axe is a 10,000 year old warrior who has spent the better part of those years perfecting the art of killing, and who better to pitch him against in his first issue than — Death's Head! Written by Simon Jowett (WILD THING) and penciled by Edmund Perryman (MOTORMOUTH), BLACK AXE combines ancient battle techniques, high-tech weaponry and an indestructible axe, to form one very unique new book. The first three issues feature covers by John Romita, Jr. (PUNISHER WAR ZONE, CABLE).

And SHADOW RIDERS, a four issue limited series originally scheduled to ship in January has been moved back to debut in April, guest-starring GHOST RIDER and CABLE.

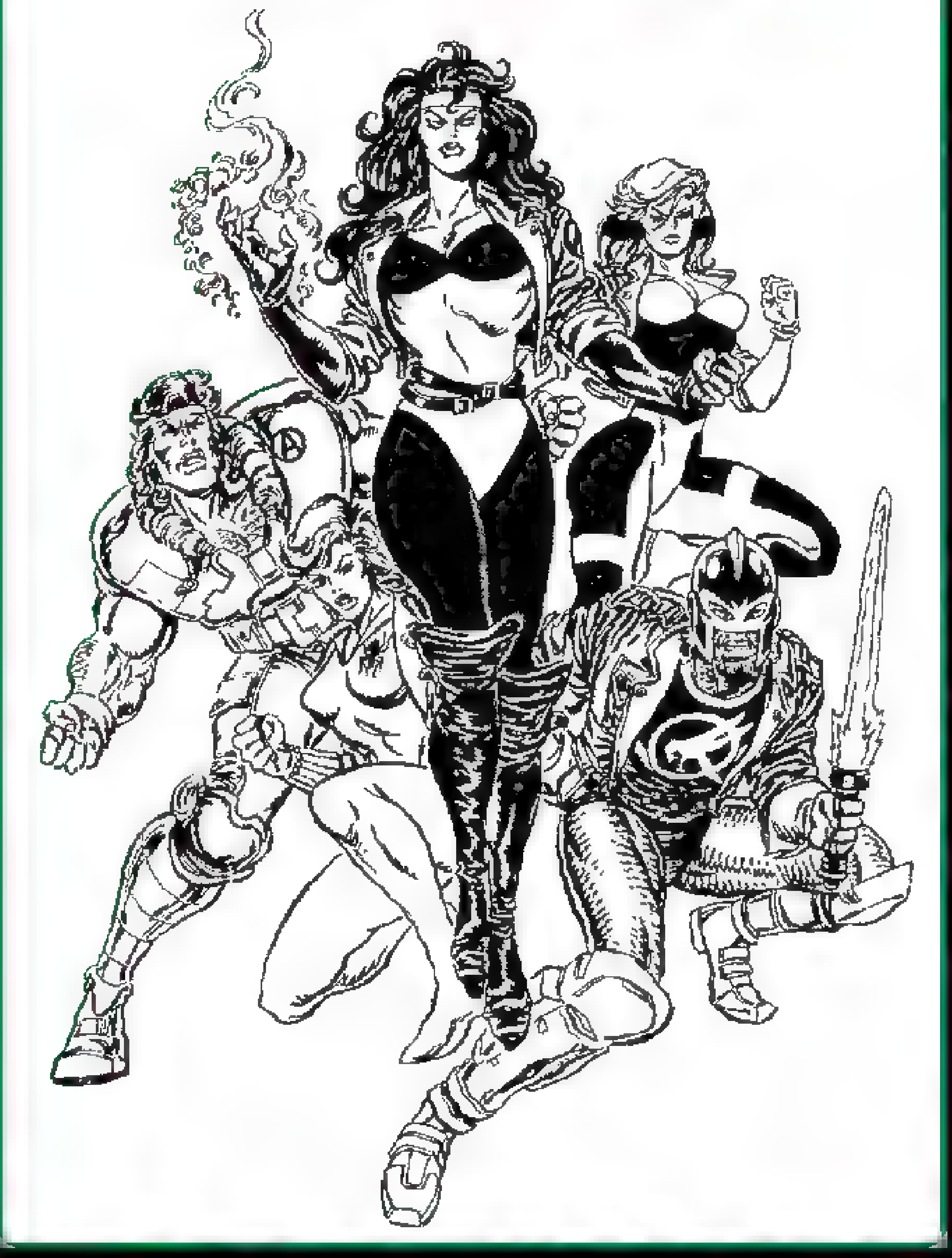


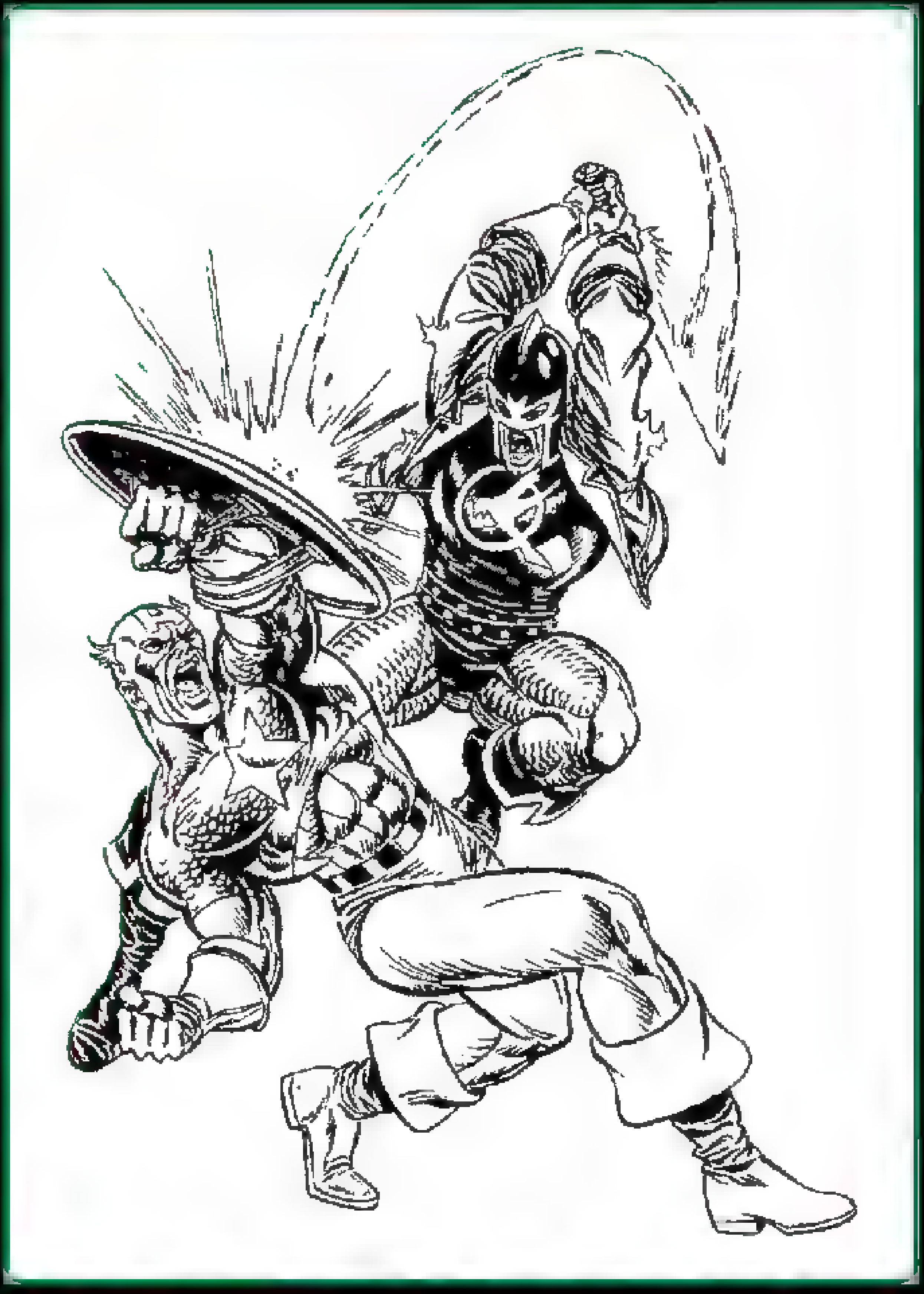
Wild Thing



Black Axe

COVER TO AVENGERS #366





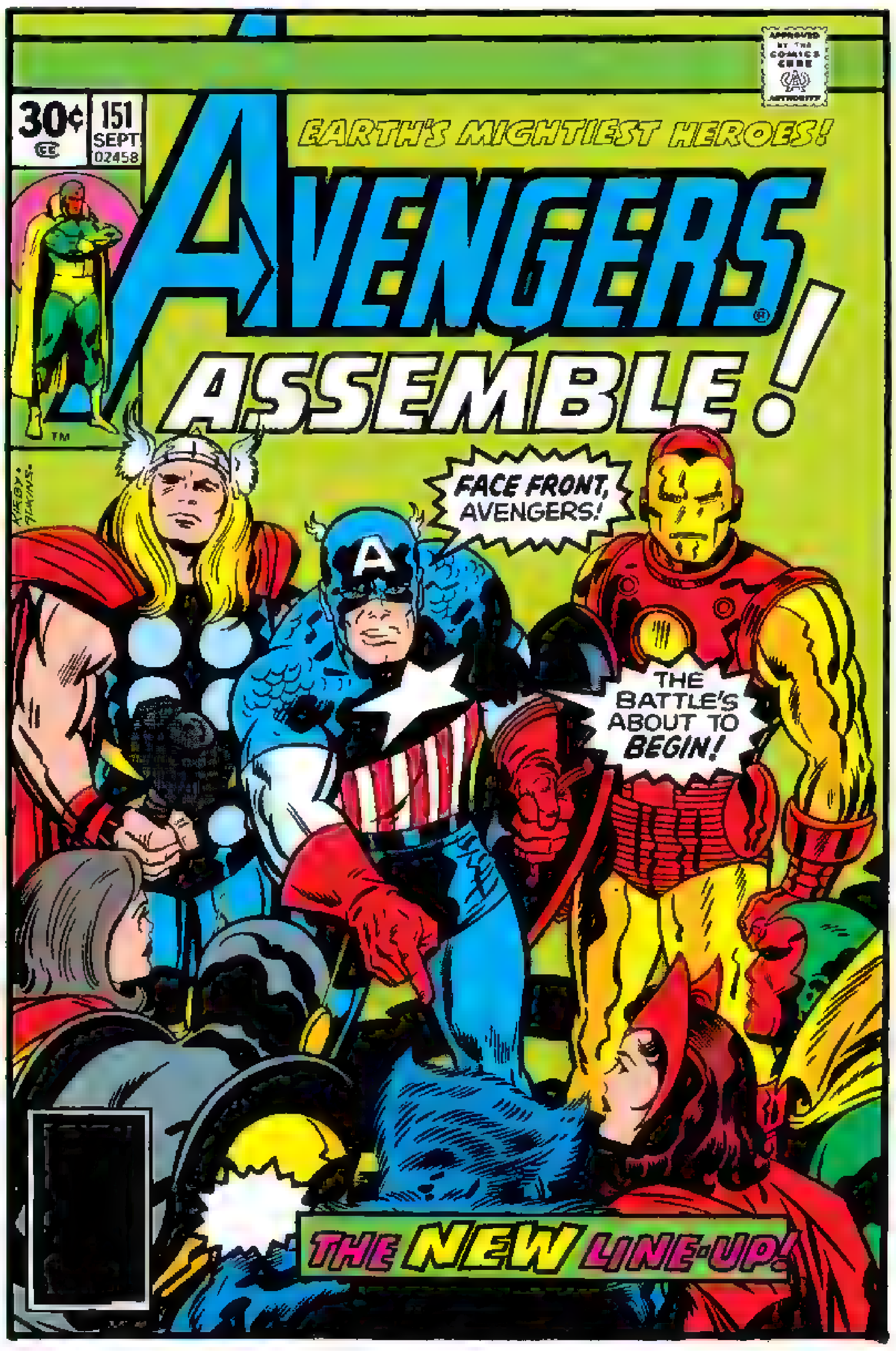
AVENGERS #363 & *#366* COVER ART BY STEVE EPTING & TOM PALMER

Mark's REMARKS

Up this month, random observations about Earth's mightiest super hero team, by the guy who edited their book longer than anyone.

1

If I were a super hero, I'd want to hang around with other super heroes. That's the appeal of a team book, seeing super heroes interact with their peers. Sure, it's interesting to see how civilians relate to super heroes, but I like to know what goes on behind closed doors, what the real pecking order is among the superhuman elite, who gets along with whom and who thinks who's a blowhard. Of all the team books ever done, THE AVENGERS does this best.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EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES!
AVENGERS
ASSEMBLE!
FACE FRONT, AVENGERS!
THE BATTLE'S ABOUT TO BEGIN!
THE NEW LINE-UP!

2

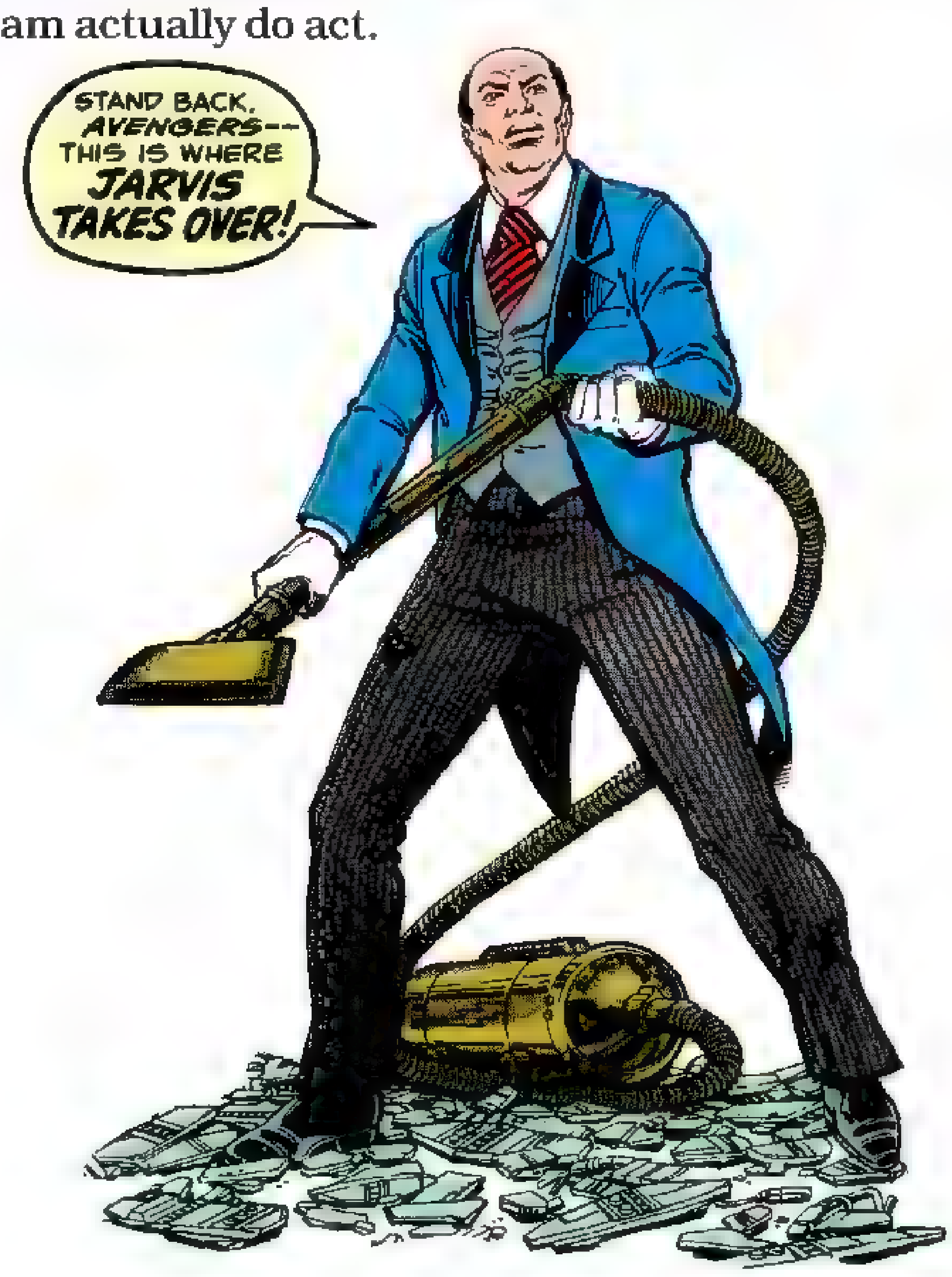
The difference between groups and teams: a group is any collection of individuals with something in common, such as an ethnic group, a social group, a mutant rights group, etc. A team is a collection of individuals, united in purpose and action: such as a sports team, a debate team, a drill team. The Avengers is a team. Infinity Watch is a group.

I've heard a lot of artists say they hate drawing group books. I couldn't figure this out at first — after all, aren't all books group books? Doesn't every solo hero have a group of supporting characters? Then I realized that what these artists disliked was executing the choreography of multiple individuals in action together. That is, indeed, a lot harder than drawing a single hero against a single villain. Artists vary drastically in their ability to depict simultaneous multiple actions. The best AVENGERS artists — like John Buscema, John Byrne, and Steve Epting — are the best action choreographers. They can draw multiple actions on multiple planes in the same panel, clearly showing the relationship of each hero to the others at any given moment.

3

I always had a problem with the world's mightiest super-team relying on one man, good ol' Jarvis, to do everything from cooking to coordinating field assignments. It may have been fine in the early days, when the Avengers were little more than a social club for super heroes, but now they're the preeminent super-hero peacekeeping force! Under my editorial tenure, I instituted Jarvis's staff. It's not that we have to see a lot of them in any issue; it's just comforting to know they're there.

I love knowing the rules and regulations by which organizations are supposed to act. When I was the AVENGERS editor, I reread all the back issues trying to come up with the team's standard operating procedures. Then I commissioned writer Roger Stern to write the Avengers charter. To me, it would be next to impossible to write or edit a single story of a team before I knew exactly how that team was supposed to function. It is also grist for a hundred stories that contrast the way a team's *supposed* to act with the way the members of a team actually do act.


STAND BACK, AVENGERS-- THIS IS WHERE JARVIS TAKES OVER!

4

My favorite all-time AVENGERS storylines: 1. Kree-Skrull War. . . 2. The Korvac saga. . . 3. The Scarlet

Witch/Wundagore/Chthon three-parter (which, immodestly enough, I co-plotted). . . 4. The Kang/Celestial Madonna Quest. . .

My least favorite AVENGERS storylines: 1. The Hank and Jan Pym break-up. . . 2. Ms. Marvel gets pregnant by Marcus Immortus. . . 3. Acts of Vengeance. . .

Funny story about Ms. Marvel and Marcus Immortus: In the original scenario Marcus wasn't supposed to be the father of Carol Danvers' "child," the Supreme Intelligence was. The child in AVENGERS #200 was supposed to be a newborn cosmic baby with the S.I.'s spaghetti-head look. But a WHAT IF story about the Kree-Skrull War came out around the same time, with a plot featuring a Supreme Intelligence spawn, so the editor in chief ordered writer David Michelinie to find a different father. Thus the nonsensical finale of issue #200!

5

My favorite Avengers line-up to date: Captain America, Iron Man, Thor, Vision, Scarlet Witch, Yellowjacket, and the Wasp. It's got the big three, plus two very different couples. While Cap, Thor, and Iron Man were always the heart of the Avengers, the Vision and Scarlet Witch were the soul. Watching their arduous relationship grow was one of the book's biggest pleasures in the '70's. When they got married, all the dramatic tension dissolved from their relationship, and there was nothing comparable to take its place! (Finally now, with the Crystal-Black Knight-Sersi triangle, we have something romantically interesting going on!) I like the Vision's reversion to his original personality. It feels like I've gotten the true Vision back after all these years. (But do something about that milk-white suit you're wearing, Vizh!)

My least favorite Avengers line-up: Cap, Iron Man, Thor, Tigra, and Wasp. No romance.

Good characters who should never have become Avengers: Mister Fantastic, Invisible Woman, Moon Knight, Spider-Man, and Sandman.

Folks who seriously need to become Avengers: Thundra, Giant-Man, Will O' The Wisp, and Iron Fist.

6

Sometimes I regret having invented the West Coast Avengers. It came out of a discussion I had with then-AVENGERS writer Roger Stern. We were doing the "Ultimate Vision" storyline which culminated in #254, and I said, "We've got to make this a big deal, have this story change their status quo forever." We had the Vision plan an international Avengers organization with franchises all over the place. He only got as far as a West Coast branch before his sinister programming was discovered. So why do I regret the AWC's existence? Well, to legitimatize the second team, we wanted one of the founding Avengers in the line-up. Iron Man was out west at the time, so we designated him as the old-time mainstay. I now realize that, in doing so, I permanently discombobulated the Cap, Thor, Iron Man trinity that is at the Avengers' core. *Mea culpa.*

7

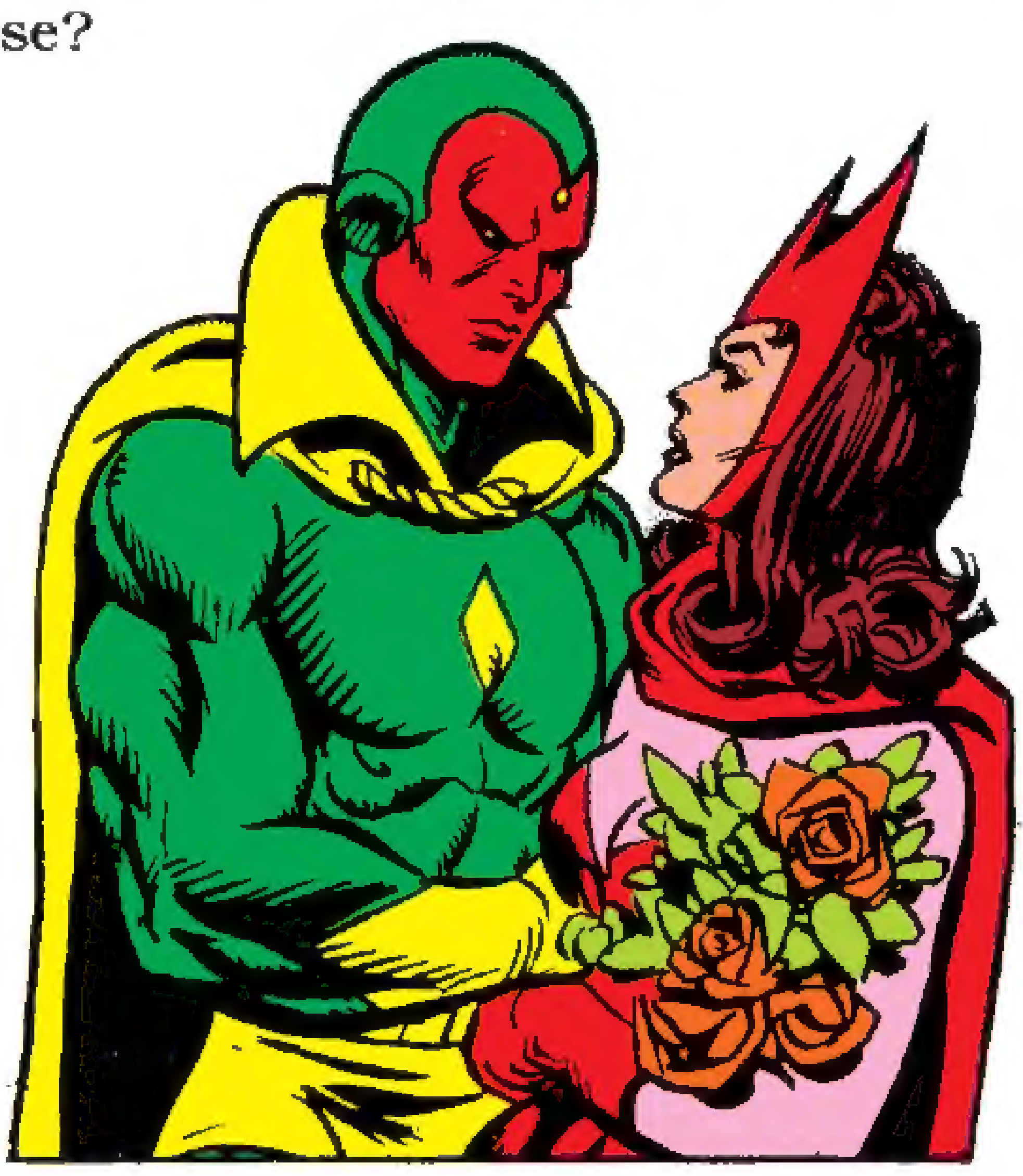
Both Avengers teams need more good villains. The only good Avengers villains are those powerful enough to give the whole team a run for its money. I mean, once you go past Kang and Ultron, who else is there? It's amazing that the team has lasted 30 years and still has so few recurring villains. Immortus? Too much like Kang, too ambiguous in his villainy. Grim Reaper? Not as yet powerful enough to take them all on. Nebula? She's in Silver Surfer terrain now. Who else is there? I must admit that the new guys Bob Harras has whipped up — Proctor and his Gatherers — are very intriguing. Time will tell if they become big-time.

8

When we wrote the MARVEL UNIVERSE Avengers Mansion entry, we decided to determine where the building was located. In all past stories, it was on Fifth Avenue facing Central Park, so I personally scouted Fifth Avenue from 59th Street all the way uptown along the park. The block between 70th and 71st Streets caught my eye. On it is the Frick Museum, a dead ringer for the original Avengers Mansion! Wonder if this was the inspiration 'way back when the mansion was first designed?

And once, when AVENGERS Editor Ralph Macchio and I visited Los Angeles, WEST COAST scribe Roy Thomas gave us directions to Palos Verde Drive. We drove right past where we calculated the West Coast compound to be.

I have a difficult time deciding whether I'd prefer the New York headquarters or the Palos Verde Compound. Hacienda architecture or steel, glass and concrete? Bungalows or a view of the park? Barbecues or Sersi's ultra-trendy Manhattan parties? Hmm. Which would you choose?



9

Special notes to kids who play the Avengers in the back yard: The best Avengers to impersonate in order to maximize the action are: Cap, Hawkeye, Quicksilver, Black Knight, Thor, Wonder Man, Mockingbird, and She-Hulk.

A. Cap: A garbage can cover will make an adequate Cap's shield, but make sure it's a plastic one before you throw.

B. Hawkeye: Try that new Nerf crossbow, and don't expect a boxing-glove arrow to fly very far.

C. Quicksilver: when running at super speed, make a distinctive verbal "speed whine." When everyone hears it, they have to shift to slow motion.

D. Black Knight: plastic swords only — wood hurts.

E. Thor: A croquet mallet hammer works fine, but remember — Thor never throws Mjolnir at mere mortals, and neither should you. Just use it for deflecting projectiles, smashing cardboard walls or doors down, and summoning lightning.

G. Wonder Man and She-Hulk: every "normal strength" opponent has to agree to pull punches and collapse at your every touch. After all, you're super strong.

H. Mockingbird: For battle-staves, I recommend empty wrapping paper tubes or plastic toy nunchakus, taken apart.

I. Avoid Yellowjacket, Goliath, Scarlet WItch, Captain Marvel, and Quasar. Their powers are next to impossible to simulate without having to constantly explain to your playmates what you've just done to them.

That's it for me. 'Til next time and forever — Avengers Assemble!

– Mark Gruenwald

stan's SOAP BOX

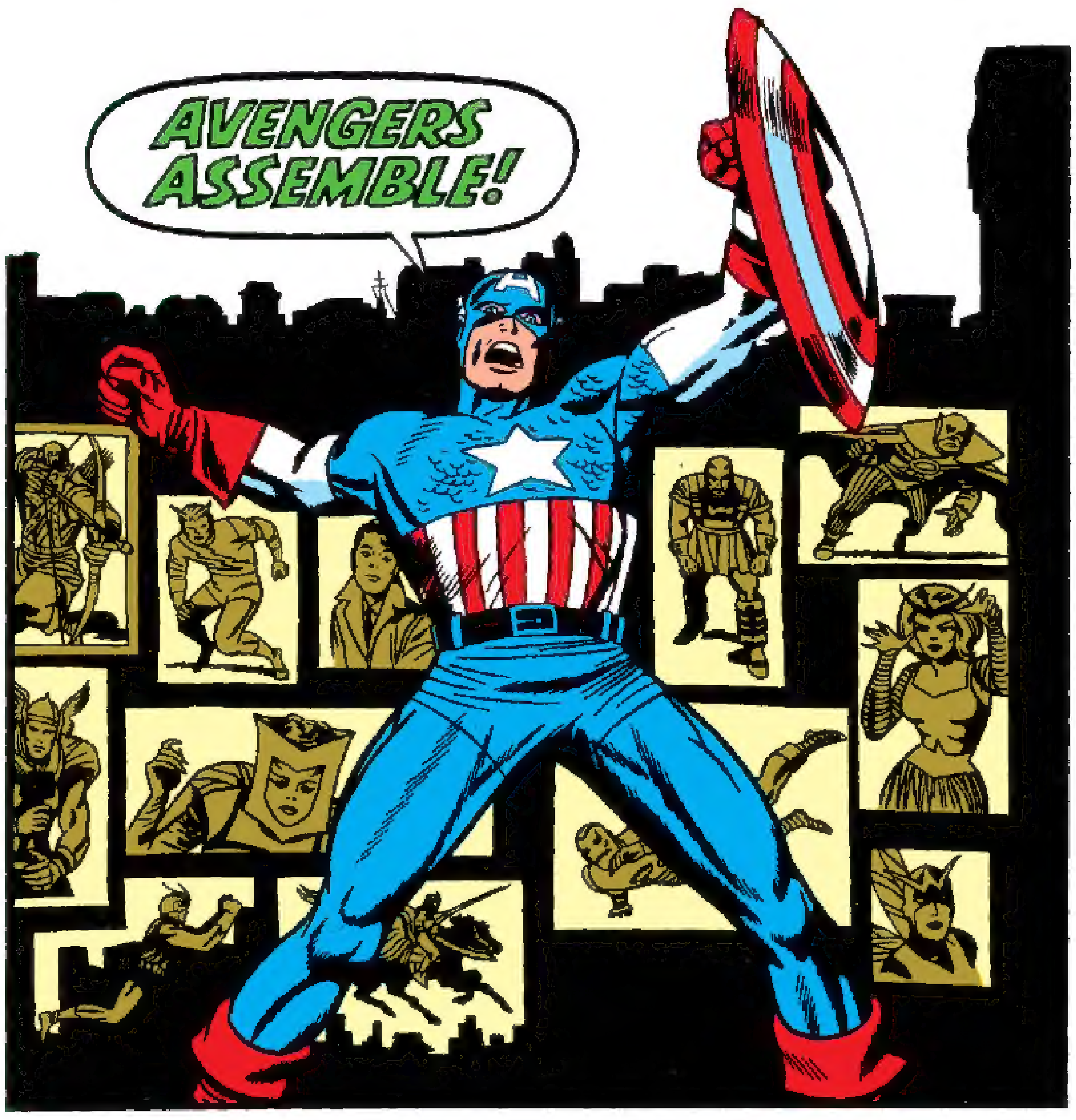
THE AVENGERS

1 SEPT.

Hi, heroes!

Let's go back to September '63. (Of course, I realize that some of you can't literally go back, because you weren't even born at that time, but humor me anyway.)

The ninth month of the sixty-third year of the twentieth century is a date I'll never forget, because that was the time I suggested to the gang in the bullpen that we gather some of our most colorful heroes (and one heroine) together and feature them as an ongoing super team.


AVENGERS ASSEMBLE!

The rationale was obvious. Judging by the mountain of mail we received each month, we knew that our rollickin' readers loved it when one or more super heroes would appear in another hero's mag. Nothing seemed to make the howlin' hordes of Marveldom happier than reading a story which had more than one costumed cavorter recklessly romping through the pages.

Of course, in '63 we already had FANTASTIC FOUR, which had been setting all sorts of sales records for the past couple of years, and we were also planning to launch the rather daring and unusual concept of the X-MEN in September, but those two books were still somewhat different. They consisted of heroes who belonged to their own team and to their own team only! They didn't join up with any other do-gooders on a regular basis.

On the other hand, it seemed like it would be an interesting idea to take characters who were *already* established in their own monthly magazines and let them join forces, to fight as a team, in a separate magazine which would also be published monthly.

But there's still another reason we created THE AVENGERS, one which I've never revealed in print before! As you know, one feature on which Marvel has always prided itself is our attention to characterization. We've always tried to have heroes who are more than one-dimensional characters, heroes who are flesh and blood, with real personalities, fears and problems just like anyone else. So, just think of it. What better way to emphasize our heroes' true nature, to give you a handle on how they really think and behave, than to have them interact with each other? Think of all the conflicts and rivalries, the jealousies and emotional traumas we're able to reveal by putting a group of powerful, strong-willed, independent heroes together, heroes who had always been used to acting on their own, who had never before been asked to do things 'for the good of the team!' I instinctively sensed that this new group of Earth's mightiest super heroes, which we called THE AVENGERS, would typify everything that the so-called "Marvel style" represented!

Selecting the members was the most. We couldn't wait to see what would happen, storywise, when we put totally unique and unrelated characters like Thor, The Hulk, Iron Man, Ant Man and The Wasp together!

Another great things about The Avengers was (and still is) the fact that the team is open-ended. We can add new members at any time and we can send others packing whenever we feel the team is getting too crowded. One of our most memorable issues was #4, in which we brought back Captain America after he had been lamentably missing from comic books for more than a decade. Cap, a born leader, soon took over the chairmanship of the team, and the rest was history!

Today, as you know, we have our regular AVENGERS mag as well as AVENGERS WEST COAST. If their popularity continues to soar, don't be surprised to see, sometime in the future, AVENGERS DEEP SOUTH, or AVENGERS FAR NORTH, or AVENGERS THIRD AVENUE BETWEEN OAK STREET AND ELM! Hey, nothing's too far out for the genial geniuses of your batty bullpen!

But now, alas, we have to part. Much as I'd like to linger longer, I have to respond to the most dramatic cry of all which just rang through the hall. So, as I rush to join the world's mightiest super heroes before the haunting echo of "AVENGERS ASSEMBLE" can die away, there's just barely time to remind you that no matter what happens, "Fata viam invenient!"

Excelsior!

- Stan Lee

GATHERING DOOM!

The mysterious Gatherers have big plans for the Vision, while the other Avengers have their hands full with one of their own: the powerful sorceress Sersi! Captain America returns — but things have changed in his absence, and the Black Knight won't take kindly to being bossed around! The Dane/Sersi/Crystal love triangle gets ever more complicated as the Avengers finally meet their shadowy nemesis: Proctor of the Gatherers! Deathcry enters the world of the Avengers, and Hank Pym becomes Giant-Man once more! But who is the Bloodwraith? Plus: U.S.Agent, War Machine and Thunderstrike form a new "big three" in a time-travel tussle with Terminatrix — and Cap, Iron Man and Thor aren't far behind them! All that and Deadpool too!

VOLUME
24
1993-1994

AVENGERS #360-366 & ANNUAL #22, AVENGERS: THE TERMINATRIX OBJECTIVE #1-4, AVENGERS STRIKEFILE AND AVENGERS ANNIVERSARY MAGAZINE

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ZONE